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Sign of the Unicorn

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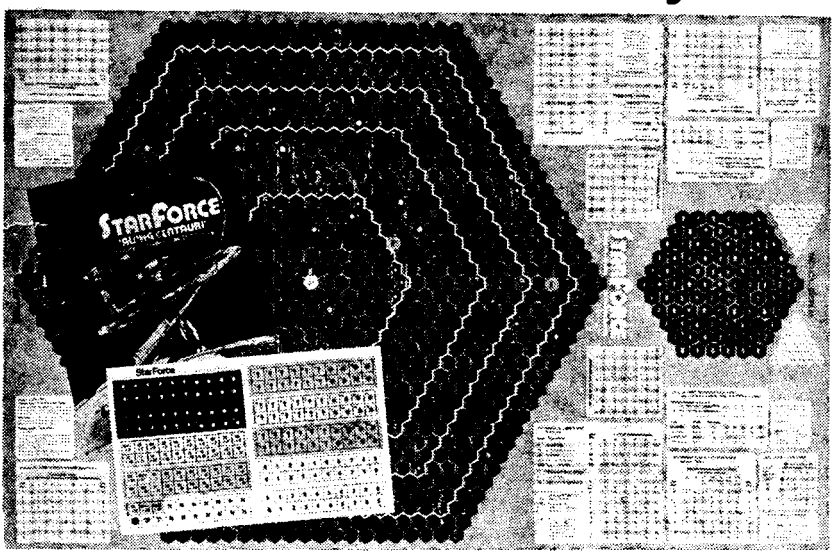

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JANUARY 1975
Vol. 36, No. 1

Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION
MAGAZINE

Arnold E. Abramson, *Publisher*
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L. C. Murphy, *Subscriptions* Jerry Pournelle, Ph. D., *Science Editor*
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Cover by Freff & Pini, from SIGN OF THE UNICORN
Interior illustrations by Fabian, Freff, Gaughan, Pini

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EDITORIAL

FUSION

This is the first issue of *Galaxy* incorporating *Worlds of IF*. In this regard I would like to quote the relevant portions of my Editorial in *IF's* final issue:

> But be of good cheer. The rowdy, fun-loving spirit I have striven to infuse into this magazine will not be lost, but will sound in clear if muted tones in a fusion of the best of two worlds—the best of *Galaxy*, which has long stood for intellectual and esthetic pre-eminence, and the best of this magazine. And surely I don't have to tell you what *IF* is all about!
>
> Here are a few of the contributions to that new magazine that otherwise would have appeared in *Worlds of IF*. *The Alien Viewpoint* of Dick Geis will continue to delight and enrage you on a bimonthly basis. *The Editor's Page* will also maintain a bimonthly presence, as will *SF Calendar*. *Sign of the Unicorn*, a new *Amber* novel by Roger Zelazny (this year's WORLDCON Guest of Honor) will first see print in the new *Galaxy/IF*. A new Mack Reynolds story. A new Chandler. A "Berserker." And (as the saying goes), much, much more!

So let us make a virtue of our necessities. Heretofore *Galaxy* and *Worlds of IF* have each catered largely to a particular sub-set within the generality of science fiction readers. Now the task is simpler; to aim straight for the center, to create—hopefully with the aid of massive reader feedback—the ideal sf magazine. With a lot of help from my friends, I think I can do it.

So welcome to *Galaxy*, incorporating *Worlds of IF*—the best science fiction magazine in the World!

—Baen

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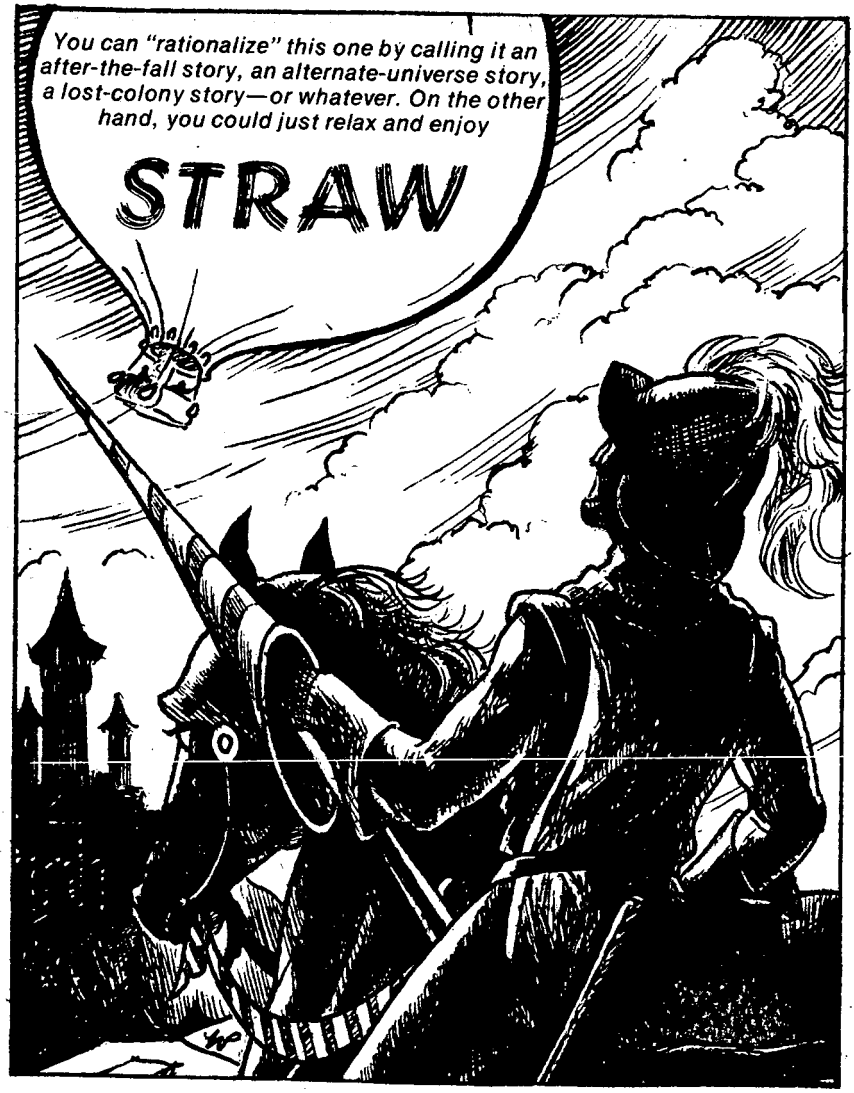
You can "rationalize" this one by calling it an after-the-fall story, an alternate-universe story, a lost-colony story—or whatever. On the other hand, you could just relax and enjoy
STRAW

Gene Wolfe

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YES, I remember killing my first man very well; I was just seventeen. A flock of snow geese flew under us that day about noon. I remember looking over the side of the basket, and seeing them; and thinking that they looked like a pike-head. That was an omen, of course, but I did not pay any attention.

It was clear, fall weather—a trifle chilly. I remember that. It must have been about the mid-part of October. Good weather for the balloon. Clow would reach up every quarter hour or so with a few double handsful of straw for the brazier, and that was all it required. We cruised, usually, at about twice the height of a steeple.

You have never been in one? Well, that shows how things have changed. Before the Fire-wights came, there was hardly any fighting at all, and free swords had to travel all over the continent looking for what there was. A balloon was better than walking, believe me. Miles—he was our captain in those days—said that where there were three soldiers together, one was certain to put a shaft through a balloon; it was too big a target to resist, and that would show you where the armies were.

No, we would not have been killed. You would have had to slit the thing wide open before it would fall fast, and a little hole like the business end of a pike would make would just barely let you know it was there. The baskets do not swing, either, as people think. Why should they? They feel no wind—they are traveling with it. A man just seems to hang there, when he is up in one of them, and the world turns under him. He can hear everything—pigs and chickens, and the squeak the windlass makes drawing water from a well.

"Good flying weather," Clow said to me.

I nodded. Solemnly, I suppose.

"All the lift you want, in weather like this. The colder it is, the better she pulls. The heat from the fire doesn't like the chill, and tries to escape from it. That's what they say."

Blond Bracata spat over the side. "Nothing in our bellies," she said, "that's what makes it lift. If we don't eat today you won't have to

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light the fire tomorrow—I'll take us up myself."

She was taller than any of us except Miles, and the heaviest of us all; but Miles would not allow for size when the food was passed out, so I suppose she was the hungriest too.

Derek said: "We should have stretched one of that last bunch over the fire. That would have fetched a pot of stew, at the least."

Miles shook his head. "There were too many."

"They would have run like rabbits."

"And if they hadn't?"

"They had no armor."

Unexpectantly, Bracata came in for the captain. "They had twenty-two men, and fourteen women. I counted them."

"The women wouldn't fight."

"I used to be one of them. I would have fought."

Clow's soft voice added, "Nearly any woman will fight if she can get behind you."

Bracata stared at him, not sure whether he was supporting her or not. She had her mitts on—she was as good with them as anyone I have ever seen—and I remember that I thought for an instant that she would go for Clow right there in the basket. We were packed in like fledgings in the nest, and fighting, it would have taken at least three of us to throw her out—by which time she would have killed us all, I suppose. But she was afraid of Clow. I found out why later. She respected Miles, I think, for his judgment and courage, without being afraid of him. She did not care much for Derek either way, and of course I was hardly there at all as far as she was concerned. But she was just a little frightened by Clow.

Clow was the only one I was not frightened by—but that is another story too.

"Give it more straw," Miles said.

"We're nearly out."

"We can't land in this forest."

Clow shook his head and added straw to the fire in the brazier—about half as much as he usually did. We were sinking toward what looked like a red and gold carpet.

"We got straw out of them anyway," I said, just to let the others know I was there.

"You can always get straw," Clow told me. He had drawn a throwing spike, and was feigning to clean his nails with it. "Even from swineherds, who you'd think wouldn't have it. They'll get it to be rid of us."

"Bracata's right," Miles said. He gave the impression that he had not heard Clow and me. "We have to have food today."

Derek snorted. "What if there are twenty?"

"We stretch one over the fire. Isn't that what you suggested? And if it takes fighting, we fight. But we have to eat today." He looked at me. "What did I tell you when you joined us, Jerr? High pay or nothing? This is the nothing. Want to quit?"

I said, "Not if you don't want me to."

Clow was scraping the last of the straw from the bag. It was hardly a handful. As he threw it in the brazier Bracata asked, "Are we going to set down in the trees?"

Clow shook his head and point-

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ed. Away in the distance I could see a speck of white on a hill. It looked too far, but the wind was taking us there, and it grew and grew until we could see that it was a big house, all built of white brick, with gardens and outbuildings, and a road that ran up to the door. There are none like that left now, I suppose.

LANDINGS are the most exciting part of traveling by balloon, and sometimes the most unpleasant. If you are lucky, the basket stays upright. We were not. Our basket snagged and tipped over and was dragged along by the envelope, which fought the wind and did not want to go down, cold though it was by then. If there had been a fire in the brazier still, I suppose we would have set the meadow ablaze. As it was, we were tumbled about like toys. Bracata fell on top of me, as heavy as stone: and she had the claws of her mits out, trying to dig them into the turf to stop herself, so that for a moment I thought I was going to be killed. Derek's pike had been charged, and the ratchet released in the confusion; the head went flying across the field, just missing a cow.

By the time I recovered my breath and got to my feet, Clow had the envelope under control and was treading it down. Miles was up too, straightening his hauberk and sword-belt. "Look like a soldier," he called to me. "Where are your weapons?"

A pincer-mace and my pike were all I had, and the pincer-mace had fallen out of the basket. After five minutes of looking, I found it in the tall grass, and went over to help Clow fold the envelope.

When we were finished, we stuffed it in the basket and put our pikes through the rings on each side so we could carry it. By that time we could see men on horseback coming down from the big house. Derek said, "We won't be able to stand against horsemen in this field."

For an instant I saw Miles smile. Then he looked very serious. "We'll have one of those fellows over a fire in half an hour."

Derek was counting, and so was I. Eight horsemen, with a cart following them. Several of the horsemen had lances, and I could see the sunlight winking on helmets and breastplates. Derek began pounding the butt of his pike on the ground to charge it.

I suggested to Clow that it might look more friendly if we picked up the balloon and went to meet the horsemen, but he shook his head. "Why bother?"

The first of them had reached the fence around the field. He was sitting a roan stallion that took it at a clean jump and came thundering up to us looking as big as a donjon on wheels.

"Greetings," Miles called. "If this be your land, lord, we give thanks for your hospitality. We'd not have intruded, but our conveyance has exhausted its fuel."

"You are welcome," the horseman called. He was as tall as Miles or taller, as well as I could judge, and as wide as Bracata. "Needs must, as they say, and no harm done." Three of the others had jumped their mounts over the fence

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behind him. The rest were taking down the rails so the cart could get through.

"Have you straw, lord?" Miles asked. I thought it would have been better if he had asked for food. "If we could have a few bundles of straw, we'd not trouble you more."

"None here," the horseman said, waving a mail-clad arm at the fields around us, "yet I feel sure my bailiff could find you some. Come up to the hall for a taste of meat and a glass of wine, and you can make your ascension from the terrace; the ladies would be delighted to see it, I'm certain. You're floating swords, I take it?"

"We are that," our captain affirmed, "but persons of good character nonetheless. We're called the Faithful Five—perhaps you've heard of us? High-hearted, fierce-fighting wind-warriors all, as it says on the balloon."

A younger man, who had reined up next to the one Miles called "lord," snorted. "If that boy is high-hearted, or a fierce fighter either, I'll eat his breeks."

Of course, I should not have done it. I have been too mettlesome all my life, and it has gotten me in more trouble than I could tell you of if I talked till sunset, though it has been good to me too—I would have spent my days following the plow, I suppose, if I had not knocked down Derek for what he called our goose. But you see how it was. Here I had been thinking of myself as a hard-bitten balloon soldier, and then to hear something like that. Anyway, I swung the pincer-mace overhand once I had a good grip on his stirrup. I had been afraid the extension spring was a bit weak, never having used one before, but it worked well; the pliers got him under the left arm and between the ear and the right shoulder, and would have cracked his neck for him properly if he had not been wearing a gorget. As it was, I jerked him off his horse pretty handily, and got out the little aniace that screwed into the mace handle. A couple of the other horsemen couched their lances, and Derek had a finger on the dog-catch of his pike; so all in all it looked as if there could be a proper fight, but "lord" (I learned afterwards that he was the Baron Ascolot) yelled at the young man I had pulled out of his saddle, and Miles yelled at me and grabbed my left wrist, and thus it all blew over.

When we had tripped the release and gotten the mace open and retracted again, Miles said: "He will be punished, lord. Leave him to me. It will be severe, I assure you."

"No, upon my oath," the baron declared, "It will teach my son to be less free with his tongue in the company of armed men. He has been raised at the hall, Captain, where everyone bends the knee to him. He must learn not to expect that of strangers."

The cart rolled up just then, drawn by two fine mules—either of them would have been worth my father's holding, I judged—and at the baron's urging we loaded our balloon into it and climbed in after it ourselves, sitting on the fabric. The horsemen galloped off, and the cart driver cracked his lash over the mules' backs.

"Quite a place," Miles remark-

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ed. He was looking up at the big house toward which we were making.

I whispered to Clow, "A palace, I should say," and Miles overheard me, and said: "It's a villa, Jerr—the unfortified country property of a gentleman. If there were a wall and a tower, it would be a castle, or at least a castellet."

THERE were gardens in front, very beautiful as I remember, and a fountain. The road looped up before the door, and we got out and trooped into the hall, while the baron's man—he was richer-dressed than anybody I had ever seen up till then, a fat man with white hair—set two of the hostlers to watch our balloon while it was taken back to the stableyard.

Venison and beef were on the table, and even a pheasant with all his feathers put back; and the baron and his sons sat with us and drank some wine and ate a bit of bread each for hospitality's sake. Then the baron said, "Surely you don't fly in the dark, captain?"

"Not unless we must, lord."

"Then with the day drawing to a close, it's just as well for you that we've no straw. You can pass the night with us, and in the morning I'll send my bailiff to the village with the cart. You'll be able to ascend at mid-morning, when the ladies can have a clear view of you as you go up."

"No straw?" our captain asked.

"None, I fear, here. But they'll have aplenty in the village, never doubt it. They lay it in the road to silence the horses' hoofs when a woman's with child, as I've seen many a time. You'll have a cartload as a gift from me, if you can use that much." The baron smiled as he said that; he had a friendly face, round and red as an apple. "Now tell me," (he went on) "how it is to be a floating sword. I always find other men's trades of interest, and it seems to me you follow one of the most fascinating of all. For example, how do you gauge the charge you will make your employer?"

"We have two scales, lord," Miles began. I had heard all of that before, so I stopped listening. Bracata was next to me at table, so I had all I could do to get something to eat for myself, and I doubt I ever got a taste of the pheasant. By good luck, a couple of lasses—the baron's daughters—had come in, and one of them started curling a lock of Derek's hair around her finger, so that distracted him while he was helping himself to the venison, and Bracata put an arm around the other and warned her of Men. If it had not been for that I would not have had a thing; as it was, I stuffed myself on deer's meat until I had to loose my waistband. Flesh of any sort had been a rarity where I came from.

I had thought that the baron might give us beds in the house, but when we had eaten and drunk all we could hold, the white-haired fat man led us out a side door and over to a wattle-walled building full of bunks—I suppose it was kept for the extra laborers needed at harvest. It was not the palace bedroom I had been dreaming of; but it was cleaner than home, and there was a big fireplace down at one end with

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logs stacked ready by, so it was probably more comfortable for me than a bed in the big house itself would have been.

Clow took out a piece of cherry wood, and started carving a woman in it, and Bracata and Derek lay down to sleep. I made shift to talk to Miles, but he was full of thoughts, sitting on a bench near the hearth and chinking the purse (just like this one, it was) he had gotten from the baron; so I tried to sleep too. But I had had too much to eat to sleep so soon, and since it was still light out, I decided to walk around the villa and try to find somebody to chat with. The front looked too grand for me; I went to the back, thinking to make sure our balloon had suffered no hurt, and perhaps have another look at those mules.

THERE were three barns behind the house, built of stone up to the height of my waist, and wood above that, and whitewashed. I walked into the nearest of them, not thinking about anything much besides my full belly until a big war horse with a white star on his forehead reached his head out of his stall and nuzzled at my cheek. I reached out and stroked his neck for him the way they like. He nickered, and I turned to have a better look at him. That was when I saw what was in his stall. He was standing on a span or more of the cleanest, yellowest straw I had ever seen. I looked up over my head then, and there was a loft full of it up there.

In a minute or so, I suppose it was, I was back in the building where we were to sleep, shaking Miles by the shoulder and telling him I had found all the straw anyone could ask for.

He did not seem to understand, at first. "Wagon loads of straw, Captain," I told him. "Why every horse in the place has as much to lay him on as would carry us a hundred leagues."

"All right," Miles told me.

"Captain—"

"There's no straw here, Jerr. Not for us. Now be a sensible lad and get some rest."

"But there is, Captain. I saw it. I can bring you back a helmetful."

"Come here, Jerr," he said, and got up and led me outside. I thought he was going to ask me to show him the straw; but instead of going back to where the barns were, he took me away from the house to the top of a grassy knoll. "Look out there, Jerr. Far off. What do you see?"

"Trees." I said. "There might be a river at the bottom of the valley; then more trees on the other side."

"Beyond that."

I looked to the horizon, where he seemed to be pointing. There were little threads of black smoke rising there, looking as thin as spider web at that distance.

"What do you see?"

"Smoke."

"That's straw burning, Jerr. House-thatch. That's why there's no straw here. Gold, but no straw, because a soldier gets straw only where he isn't welcome. They'll reach the river there by sundown, and I'm told it can be forded at this season. Now do you understand?"

They came that night at moonrise. ★

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ROGER ZELAZNY

SIGN OF THE UNICORN

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AN ESSAY IN AMBER

It was starting to end, after what seemed most of eternity to me.

Thus began *Nine Princes in Amber*, with the awakening of an amnesiac patient in a private sanitorium in upstate New York. Something about the arrangement seemed very wrong to him, so he contrived to escape, learning three things while he was about it: he was registered as Carl Corey; his next of kin was apparently a sister named Evelyn Flaumel, residing in Westchester; his condition was supposedly such that he should be unable to stand, let alone walk out.

He departed, proceeding at once to the residence in Westchester. There he met Evelyn, saw that she was frightened, realized the opportunity this represented and engaged her in an ad lib bluffing session wherein he succeeded in convincing her that he had recovered his memory. During the course of this, he became convinced that she was indeed his sister. This stirred the return of other, peculiar memory fragments which he seized upon to strengthen his story. During the conversation he learned that his name was really Corwin, that he was originally from a place called Amber and that there were numerous other siblings about, few of them kindly disposed toward him.

The following day, during Evelyn's absence, he discovered a strange deck of Tarot-like cards in a concealed drawer in her desk. The major trumps, he quickly realized, were representations of the various family members—himself among them. Studying them, he recognized the following individuals:

Random—wily, small, sharp-nosed, laughing mouth, straw-colored hair, dressed in a Renaissance costume of orange, red and brown.

Julian—dark hair, blue eyes, passive expression, dressed in scaled white armor which looked as if it had been enameled.

Caine—swarthy, dark eyed, dressed all in satin of black and green, wearing a three-cornered hat.

Eric—big, dark hair and beard, dressed in a leather jacket and leggings, a plain cloak, high black boots.

Benedict—tall, thin, dour, long of jaw, hazel eyes and brown hair, clad in orange and yellow and brown.

Gerard—a huge, powerfully built man, clad in a light blue dressing gown and a black belt.

Bleys—red beard, red hair, blue eyes, clad in red and orange.

Brand—small, beardless, red-haired, dressed in green, mounted on a white horse.

Flora (Evelyn)—blonde, green-eyed, clad in green.

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Deirdre—brunette, blue-eyed, dressed in black and silver.

Fiona—small, red-haired, green-eyed.

Llewella—green haired, gray-eyed, clad in gray and green and lavender.

—All of them were very cold to the touch.

Things happened quickly that day. Corwin answered the telephone and the caller proved to be his brother Random, in trouble and looking for help. He agreed to help him. Random arrived later that same day, pursued by not quite human beings whom they fought and dispatched.

The following day, having also taken in Random as to the state of his memory, Corwin agreed to an attempt to reach Amber, driving Evelyn/Flora's car. The roadway altered, the world itself changed about them as Corwin drove. He realized that somehow Random was responsible for these effects—that he was conveying them through something he called Shadow in order to reach the real world, Amber. After an extremely eventful journey, they succeeded—encountering *en route* their brother Julian, who seemed to wish them somewhat less than well, and their sister Deirdre, whom they rescued from a bit of mischief. Then, in sight of Amber, Corwin confessed the true state of his memory.

Deirdre and Random decided that the best possible remedy would be for Corwin to walk the Pattern located in a city called Rebma, Amber's mirror image beneath the sea. This was done, and the Pattern restored most of Corwin's memory along with his power over Shadow. Corwin then drew upon the power of the Pattern to transport himself into Amber, where he confronted his brother Eric. Eric, he realized, had been responsible both for the original injury which had produced his amnesia and for his exile to the shadow-world, Earth. Eric was planning on taking the throne, left vacant by the long absence of their father Oberon, now presumed dead.

Corwin and Eric fought an inconclusive duel, from which Corwin fled when palace guards arrived. Utilizing a deck of the family cards, which he then knew to be communication and transportation devices, Corwin went to his brother Bleys, whom he discovered to be in the process of putting together an army and a fleet of ships for purposes of assaulting Amber before Eric could take the throne. Corwin agreed to join him in this effort. They were later defeated in the military engagements which occurred. Bleys may or may not have perished in a fall from Kolvir, the mountain upon which Amber is situated.

Corwin, then Eric's prisoner, was forced to participate in Eric's coronation, after which he was blinded and cast into the dungeons beneath Amber. He laid a curse upon Amber at that time. Years passed, during which his eye tissues slowly regenerated. He was later assisted in escaping from the dungeons by Dworkin—his father's old adviser, the creator of the Trumps—who was now apparently quite mad.

The book ends with Corwin sailing away from Amber:

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A demon wind propelled me east of the sun.

The Guns of Avalon is the story of Corwin's search for Avalon, one of the shadow images of Amber, where he had once ruled. He was aware that a polishing rouge used by jewelers in that place could be caused to ignite in Amber, where gunpowder and other known explosives would not. He intended to employ a different type of warfare in his attempt to wrest the throne from Eric.

In the course of his search, he became involved in the troubles of a land called Lorraine, ruled by a half-willing regent named Ganelon, who appeared to be one of his own former generals—a man he had personally exiled from Avalon ages before. The ills of this land, Lorraine, were strangely like those which now lay upon Amber, and he felt constrained to remain for a time and help to combat them. The presence of a woman, also named Lorraine, added to his resolve in this respect.

The creatures responsible for the situation were later vanquished at the center of their place of power, but not before Corwin was recognized by their leader and named by him as the one who had provided them entry to the world. Lorraine was subsequently slain by the man with whom she had run off following a disagreement with Corwin.

Corwin and Ganelon proceeded to Avalon, which recently had faced similar problems of its own. The situation had been settled, however, by the Protector of Avalon, who proved to be Corwin's elder brother Benedict—who had lost his right arm in that final battle.

Corwin and Ganelon remained in Avalon as Benedict's guests. There Corwin met a girl named Dara who claimed to be Benedict's great-granddaughter. She was anxious to learn of Amber and to visit there. Corwin told her of the Pattern, the Trumps and of Shadow—things she claimed Benedict had never properly explained to her. Later, Corwin and Dara became casually involved.

Corwin obtained the chemicals he sought, and on preparing to depart Avalon was advised by Ganelon that there were several fresh corpses in the woods nearby. Deciding not to seek further trouble, Corwin and Ganelon did nothing about this situation. They departed quickly, heading for an eventual meeting in Brussels with an arms merchant Corwin had known when he had lived on the shadow Earth.

They were pursued by Benedict, and Corwin assumed the reason to be his actions with Dara. When he faced Benedict in combat beside the black road, however, Benedict disavowed any knowledge of the existence of Dara and accused Corwin of the murder of his retainers. Corwin managed to best Benedict by means of a ruse involving the black road itself—a phenomenon somehow connected with the troubles of Amber, Lorraine and Avalon, cutting through a great number of the shadow worlds, spreading ill wherever it touched.

Leaving Benedict bound and unconscious, Corwin summoned Gerard via his Trump to attend to him. He then proceeded to Earth,

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obtained arms and ammunition, recruited a shadow assault force and returned to Amber for purposes of disposing of Eric.

He arrived in the middle of a battle, however. Amber was under attack by creatures which had reached it over the black road. He joined with the forces of Amber in repelling the attack. Eric was fatally injured in the fighting.

Before his death, Eric gave Corwin the Jewel of Judgment, the weapon he had used against him in the attack Corwin and Bleys had commanded years before. As he lay dying, he partly instructed Corwin as to its attunement.

Dara then appeared on the scene, advanced into the city, reached the Pattern and walked it—an ability supposedly only possessed by those of the blood of Amber. She underwent peculiar transformations during this passage. Completing the Pattern, she announced that Amber would be destroyed.

Then she vanished, giving no reason for this threat.

I

I IGNORED the questions in the eyes of the groom as I lowered the grisly parcel and turned the horse in for care and maintenance. My cloak could not really conceal the nature of its contents as I slung the guts over my shoulder and stamped off toward the rear entrance to the palace. Hell would soon be demanding its paycheck.

I skirted the exercise area and made my way to the trail that led toward the southern end of the palace gardens. Fewer eyes along that route. I would still be spotted, but it would be a lot less awkward than going in the front way where things are always busy. Damn.

And again, damn. Of troubles I considered myself amply possessed. But those who have do seem to get. Some spiritual form of compound interest, I suppose.

There were a few idlers beside the fountain at the far end of the garden. Also, a couple guards were passing among the bushes near the trail. The guards saw me coming, held a brief discussion and looked the other way. Prudent.

Me, back less than a week. Most things, still unresolved. The court of Amber, full of suspicion and unrest. This, now: a death to further jeopardize the brief, unhappy prereign of Corwin I: me.

Time now to do something I should have done right away. But there had been so many things to do, from the very first. It was not as if I had been nodding, as I saw it. I had assigned priorities and acted on them. Now, though . . .

I crossed the garden, out of the shade and into the slanting sunlight. I swung up the wide, curving stair. A guard snapped to attention as I entered the palace. I made for the rear stairway, then up to the second floor. Then the third.

From the right, my brother Random stepped out of his suite and into the hallway.

"Corwin!" he said, studying my face. "What's the matter? I saw you from the balcony and—"

"Inside," I said, gesturing with my eyes. "We are going to have a private conference. Now."

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He hesitated, regarding my burden.

"Let's make it two rooms up," he said. "Okay? Vialle's in here."

"All right."

He led the way, opened the door. I entered the small sitting room, sought a likely spot, dropped the body.

Random stared at the bundle.

"What am I supposed to do?" he asked.

"Unwrap the goodies," I said, "and take a look."

He knelt and undid the cloak. He folded it back.

"Dead all right," he observed. "What's the problem?"

"You did not look closely enough," I said. "Peel back an eyelid. Open the mouth and look at the teeth. Feel the spurs on the backs of the hands. Count the joints in the fingers. Then you tell me about the problem."

He began doing these things. As soon as he looked at the hands he stopped and nodded.

"All right," he said. "I remember."

"Remember out loud."

"It was back at Flora's place . . ."

"That was where *I* first saw anyone like this," I said. "They were after you, though. I never did find out why."

"That's right," he said. "I never got a chance to tell you about it. We weren't together all that long. Strange . . . Where did this one come from?"

I hesitated, torn between pushing him for his story and telling him mine. Mine won out because it was mine and very immediate.

I sighed and sank into a chair.

"We've just lost us another brother," I said. "Caine is dead. I got there a bit too late. That thing—person—did it. I wanted it alive, for obvious reasons. But it put up quite a fight. I didn't have much of a choice."

He whistled softly, seated himself in the chair opposite me.

"I see," he said, very softly.

I studied his face. Was that the faintest of smiles waiting in the wings to enter and meet my own? Quite possibly.

"No," I said flatly. "If it were otherwise, I would have arranged for a lot less doubt as to my innocence. I'm telling you what really happened."

"All right," he said. "Where is Caine?"

"Under a layer of sod, near the Grove of the Unicorn."

"That looks suspicious right there," he said. "Or will. To the others."

I nodded.

"I know. I had to hide the body and cover it in the meantime, though. I couldn't just bring him back and start parrying questions. Not when there were important facts waiting for me, in your head."

"Okay," he said. "I don't know how important they are, but they're yours. But don't leave me hanging, huh? How did this thing happen?"

"It was right after lunch," I said. "I had eaten down at the harbor with Gerard. Afterward, Benedict brought me topside through his Trump. Back in my rooms, I found a note which apparently had been slipped in under the door. It requested a private meeting, later in

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the afternoon, at the Grove of the Unicorn. It was signed 'Caine'."

"Have you still got the note?"

"Yes." I dug it out of my pocket and passed it to him. "Here."

He studied it and shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "It *could* be his writing—if he were in a hurry—but I don't think it is."

I shrugged. I took the note back, folded it, put it away.

"Whatever, I tried to reach him with his Trump, to save myself the ride. But he wasn't receiving. I guessed it was to maintain secrecy as to his whereabouts, if it was all that important. So I got a horse and rode on down."

"Did you tell anyone where you were going?"

"Not a soul. I did decide to give the horse a workout, though, so I rode along at a pretty good clip. I didn't see it happen, but I saw him lying there as I came into the wood. His throat had been cut, and there was a disturbance off in the bushes some distance away. I rode the guy down, jumped him, fought with him, had to kill him. We didn't engage in any conversation while this was going on."

"You're sure you got the right guy?"

"As sure as you can be under such circumstances. His trail went back to Caine. He had fresh blood on his garments."

"Might have been his own."

"Look again. No wounds. I broke his neck. Of course I remembered where I had seen his like before, so I brought him right to you. Before you tell me about it though, there was one more thing—just for a clincher." I withdrew the second note, passed it over. "The creature had this on its person. I presume it had removed it from Caine."

Random read it, nodded and handed it back.

"From you, to Caine, asking to be met there. Yes, I see. Needless to say . . ."

"Needless to say," I finished. "And it does look a bit like my writing—at first glance, anyway."

"I wonder what would have happened if you had gotten there first?"

"Probably nothing," I said. "Alive and looking bad—that seems how they wanted me. The trick was to get us there in the proper order, and I didn't hurry quite enough to miss what is bound to follow."

He nodded.

"Granting the tight scheduling," he said, "it had to be someone on the scene, here in the palace. Any ideas?"

I chuckled and reached for a cigarette. I lit it and chuckled again.

"I'm just back. You have been here all along," I said. "Which one hates me the most these days?"

"That is an embarrassing question, Corwin," he stated. "Everyone's down on you for something. Ordinarily, I would nominate Julian. Only it doesn't seem to hold up here."

"Why not?"

"He and Caine got along very well. For years now. They had been looking out for each other, hanging around together. Pretty thick. Julian is cold and petty and just as nasty as you remember. But if he liked anybody, he liked Caine. I

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don't think he'd do it to him, not even to get at you. After all, he could probably have found plenty of other ways if that was all he wanted."

I sighed.

"Who's next?"

"I don't know. I just don't know."

"Okay. How do you read the reactions to this?"

"You're screwed, Corwin. Everyone is going to think you did it, no matter what you say."

I nodded at the corpse. Random shook his head.

"That could easily be some poor clod you dug up out of Shadow to take the blame."

"I know," I said. "Funny, coming back to Amber as I did, I arrived at an ideal time for positioning myself advantageously."

"A perfect time," Random agreed. "You didn't even have to kill Eric to get what you wanted. That was a stroke of luck."

"Yes. Still, it is no secret that that is what I came to do, and it is only a matter of time before my troops—foreign, specially armed and quartered here—are going to start provoking some very bad feelings. Only the presence of an external threat has saved me from that so far. And then there are the things I am suspected of having done before my return—like murdering Benedict's retainers. Now this . . ."

"Yes," Random said, "I saw it coming as soon as you told me. When you and Bleys attacked years ago, Gerard deployed part of the fleet so that it was out of your way. Caine, on the other hand, engaged

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• • •

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you with his vessels and scuttled you. Now that he is gone, I imagine you will put Gerard in command of the entire fleet."

"Who else? He is the only man for the job."

"Nevertheless . . ."

"Nevertheless. Admitted. If I were going to kill any one person to strengthen my position, Caine would be the logical choice. That's the real, damning truth."

"How do you propose handling this?"

"Tell everyone what happened and try to discover who was behind it. Any better suggestions?"

"I've been trying to think how I could alibi you. But it does not look promising."

I shook my head.

"You are too close to me. No matter how good we made it sound, it would probably have the opposite effect."

"Have you considered admitting to it?"

"Yes. But self-defense is out. With a cut throat, it had to be a matter of surprise. And I have no stomach for starting off with the alternative: hoke up some evidence he was up to something rotten and say I did it for the good of Amber. I flatly refuse to take on fake guilt under those terms. I'd wind up with a bad odor that way, too."

"But with a real tough reputation."

"It's the wrong kind of tough for the sort of show I want to run. No, that's out."

"That covers everything, then—just about."

"What do you mean 'just about'?"

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He studied his left thumbnail through slitted eyes.

"Well, it occurs to me that if there is anyone else you are anxious to get out of the picture, now is the time to consider that a frame can often be shifted."

I thought about it and finished my cigarette.

"Not bad," I said, "but I can't spare any more brothers at the moment. Not even Julian. Anyhow, he's the least frameable."

"It need not be family," he said. "Plenty of noble Amberites around with possible motives. Take Sir Reginald—"

"Forget it, Random! The reframing is out, too."

"Okay. I've exhausted my little gray cells, then."

"Not the ones in charge of memory, I hope."

"All right."

He sighed. He stretched. He got to his feet, stepped over the room's other occupant and made his way to the window. Drawing back the drapes, he stared out for a time.

"All right," he repeated. "There's a lot to tell . . ."

Then Random remembered out loud and at length . . .

II

While sex heads a great number of lists, we all have other things we like to do in between. With me, Corwin, it's drumming, being up in the air and gambling—in no special order. Well, maybe soaring has a little edge—in gliders, balloons and certain variations—but mood has a lot to do with that too, you know. I mean, ask me another time and I might say one of the others. Depends on what I want most at the moment.

Anyway, I was here in Amber some years ago. Not doing much of anything. Just visiting and being a nuisance. Dad was still around, and when I noticed that he was getting into one of his grumpy moods, I decided it was time to take a walk. A long one. I had often noticed that his fondness for me tended to increase as an inverse function of my proximity. He gave me a fancy riding crop for a going-away present—to hasten the process of affection, I suppose. Still, it was a very nice crop—silver-chased, beautifully tooled—and I made good use of it. I had decided to go looking for an assemblage of all my simple pleasures in one small nook of Shadow.

It was a long ride—I will not bore you with the details—and it was pretty far from Amber, as such things go. This time, I was not looking for a place where I would be especially important. That can get either boring or difficult fairly quickly, depending on how responsible you want to be. I wanted to be an irresponsible nonentity and just enjoy myself.

Texorami was a wide open port city, with sultry days and long nights, lots of good music, gambling around the clock, duels every morning and in-between mayhem for those who couldn't wait. And the air currents were fabulous. I had a little red sail plane I used to go sky surfing in, every couple days. It was the good life. I played

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drums till all hours in a basement spot up the river where the walls sweated almost as much as the customers and the smoke used to wash around the lights like streams of milk. When I was done playing I'd go find some action, women or cards usually. And that was it for the rest of the night. Damn Eric, anyway! That reminds me again . . . He once accused me of cheating at cards, did you know that? And that's about the only thing I wouldn't cheat at. I take my card playing seriously. I'm good and I'm also lucky. Eric was neither. The trouble with him was that he was good at so many things he wouldn't admit even to himself there were some things other people could do better. If you kept beating him at anything you had to be cheating. He started a nasty argument over it one night—could have gotten serious—but Gerard and Caine broke it up. Give Caine that. He took my part that time. Poor guy . . . Hell of a way to go, you know? His throat . . . Well. Anyhow, there I was in Texorami, making music and women, winning at cards and jockeying around the sky. Palm trees and night-blooming wallflowers. Lots of good port smells—spices, coffee, tar, salt—you know. Gentlefolk, merchants and peons—the same straights as in most other places. Sailors and assorted travelers passing in and out. Guys like me living around the edges of things. I spent a little over two years in Texorami, happy. Really. Not much contact with the others. Sort of postcard-like hellos via the Trumps every now and then, and that was about it. Amber was pretty much off my mind. All this changed one night when I was sitting there with a full house and the guy across from me was trying to make up his mind whether or not I was bluffing.

The Jack of Diamonds began talking to me.

Yes, that is how it started. I was in a weird frame of mind anyway. I had just finished a couple very hot sets and was still kind of high. Also, I was physically strung out, from a long day's gliding and not much sleep the night before. I decided later that it must be our mental quirk associated with the Trumps that make me see it that way when someone was trying to reach me and I had cards in my hand—any cards. Ordinarily, of course, we get the message empty-handed, unless we are doing the calling. It could have been that my subconscious—which was kind of footloose at the time—just seized on the available props out of habit. Later, though, I had cause to wonder. Really, I just don't know.

The Jack said, "Random." Then its face blurred and it said, "Help me." I began getting a feel of the personality by then, but it was weak. The whole thing was very weak. Then the face rearranged itself and I saw that I was right. It was Brand. He looked like hell, and he seemed to be chained or tied to something. "Help me," he said again.

"I'm here," I said. "What's the matter?"

". . . Prisoner," he said, and something else that I couldn't make out.

"Where?" I asked.

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He shook his head at that.

"Can't bring you through," he said. "No Trumps, and I am too weak. You will have to come the long way around . . ."

I did not ask him how he was managing it without my Trump. Finding out where he was seemed of first importance. I asked him how I could locate him.

"Look very closely," he said. "Remember every feature. I may only be able to show you once. Come armed, too . . ."

Then I saw the landscape—over his shoulder, out a window, over a battlement—I can't be sure. It was far from Amber, somewhere where the shadows go mad. Farther than I like to go. Stark, with shifting colors. Fiery. Day without a sun in the sky. Rocks that glided like sailboats across the land. Brand there in some sort of tower—a small point of stability in that flowing scene. I remembered it, all right. And I remembered the presence coiled about the base of that tower. Brilliant. Prismatic. Some sort of watch-thing, it seemed—too bright for me to make out its outline, to guess its proper size. Then it all just went away. Instant off. And there I was, staring at the Jack of Diamonds again, with the guy across from me not knowing whether to be mad at my long distraction or concerned that I might be having some sort of sick spell.

I CLOSED up shop with that hand and went home. I lay stretched out on my bed, smoking and thinking. Brand had still been in Amber when I had departed. Later though, when I had asked after him, no one had any idea as to his whereabouts. He had been having one of his melancholy spells, had snapped out of it one day and ridden off. And that was that. No messages either—either way. He wasn't answering, he wasn't talking.

I tried to figure every angle. He was smart, damn smart. Possibly the best mind in the family. He was in trouble and he had called me. Eric and Gerard were more the heroic types and would probably have welcomed the adventure. Caine would have gone out of curiosity, I think. Julian, to look better than the rest of us and to score points with Dad. Or, easiest of all, Brand could have called Dad himself. Dad would have done something about it. But he had called me. Why?

It occurred to me then that maybe one or more of the others had been responsible for his circumstances. If, say, Dad was beginning to favor him . . . Well. You know. Eliminate the positive. And if he did call Dad, he would look like a weakling.

So I suppressed my impulse to yell for reinforcements. He had called me, and it was quite possible I would be cutting his throat by letting anyone back in Amber in on the fact that he had gotten the message out. Okay. What was in it for me?

If it involved the succession and he had truly become fair-haired, I figured that I could do a lot worse than give him this to remember me by. And if it did not . . . There were all sorts of other possibilities. Perhaps he had stumbled onto

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something going on back home, something it would be useful to know about. I was even curious as to the means he had employed for bypassing the Trumps. So it was curiosity, I'd say, that made me decide to go it alone and try to rescue him.

I dusted off my own Trumps and tried reaching him again. As you might expect, there was no response. I got a good night's sleep then and tried one more time in the morning. Again, nothing. Okay, no sense waiting any longer.

I cleaned up my blade, ate a big meal and got into some rugged clothes. I also picked up a pair of dark, polaroid goggles. Didn't know how they would work there, but that warden-thing had been awfully bright—and it never hurts to try anything extra you can think of. For that matter, I also took a gun. I had a feeling it would be worthless, and I was right. But, like I said, you never know till you try.

The only person I said good-by to was another drummer, because I stopped to give him my set before I left.

Then I went on down to the hangar, got the sail plane ready, went aloft and caught a proper current. It seemed a neat way to do it.

I don't know whether you've ever glided through Shadow, but— No? Well, I headed out over the sea till the land was only a dim line to the north. Then I had the waters go cobalt beneath me, rear up and shake sparkly beards. The wind shifted. I turned. I raced the waves shoreward beneath a darkening sky. Texorami was gone when I returned to the rivermouth, replaced by miles of swamp. I rode the currents inward, crossing and recrossing the river at new twists and kinks it had acquired. Gone were the piers, the trails, the traffic. The trees were high.

Clouds massed in the west, pink and pearl and yellow. The sun phased from orange through red to yellow. You shake your head? The sun was the price of the cities, you see. In a hurry, I depopulate—or rather, go the elemental route. At that altitude artifacts would have been distracting. Shading and texture becomes everything for me. That's what I meant about gliding it being a bit different.

So, I bore to the west till the woods gave way to surface green, lightening the while, dispersing, breaking to brown, tan, yellow. Light and crumbly then, splotched. The price of that was a storm. I rode it out, as much as I could, till the lightnings forked nearby and I feared that the gusts were getting to be too much for the little glider. I toned it down fast then, but got more green below as a result. Still, I pulled it out of the storm with a yellow sun firm and bright at my back. After a time, I got it to go desert beneath me again, stark and rolling.

Then the sun shrank and strands of cloud whipped past its face, erasing it bit by bit. That was the shortcut that took me farther from Amber than I had been in a long while.

No sun then, but the light remained, just as bright but eerie now, directionless. It tricked my eyes, it screwed up perspective. I

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dropped lower, limiting my range of vision. Soon large rocks came into view, and I fought for the shapes I remembered. Gradually, these occurred.

The buckling, flowing effect was easier to achieve under these conditions, but its production was physically disconcerting. It made it even more difficult to judge my effectiveness in guiding the glider. I got lower than I thought I was and almost collided with one of the rocks. Finally, though, the smokes rose and flames danced about as I remembered them—conforming to no particular pattern, just emerging here and there from crevasses, holes, cave mouths. Colors began to misbehave as I remembered from my brief view. Then came the actual motion of the rocks—drifting, sailing, like rudderless boats in a place where they wring out rainbows.

By then, the air currents had gone crazy. One updraft after another, like fountains. I fought them as best I could, but knew I could not hold things together much longer at that altitude. I rose a considerable distance, forgetting everything for a time while trying to stabilize the craft. When I looked down again, it was like viewing a freeform regatta of black icebergs. The rocks were racing around, clashing together, backing off, colliding again, spinning, arcing across the open spaces, passing among one another. Then I was slammed about, forced down, forced up—and I saw a strut give way. I gave the shadows their final nudge, then looked again. The tower had appeared in the distance, something brighter than ice or aluminum stationed at its base.

THAT final push had done it. I realized that just as I felt the winds start a particularly nasty piece of business. Then several cables snapped and I was on my way down—like riding a waterfall. I got the nose up, brought it in low and wild, saw where we were headed and jumped at the last moment. The poor glider was pulverized by one of those peripatetic monoliths. I felt worse about that than I did about the scrapes, rips and lumps I collected.

Then I had to move quickly, because a hill was racing toward me. We both veered, fortunately in different directions. I hadn't the faintest notion as to their motive force, and at first I could see no pattern to their movements. The ground varied from warm to extremely hot underfoot, and along with the smoke and occasional jets of flame, nasty smelling gases were escaping from numerous openings in the ground. I hurried toward the tower, following a necessarily irregular course.

It took a long while to cover the distance. Just how long, I was uncertain, as I had no way of keeping track of the time. By then, though, I was beginning to notice some interesting regularities. First, the larger stones moved at a greater velocity than the smaller ones. Second, they seemed to be orbiting one another—cycles within cycles within cycles, larger about smaller, none of them ever still. Perhaps the prime mover was a dust mote or a single molecule—somewhere. I had

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neither time nor desire to indulge in any attempt to determine the center of the affair. Keeping this in mind, I did manage to observe as I went, though, enough so that I was able to anticipate a number of their collisions well in advance.

So Childe Random to the dark tower came, yeah, gun in one hand, blade in the other. The goggles hung about my neck. With all the smoke and confused lighting, I wasn't about to don them until it became absolutely necessary.

Now, whatever the reason, the rocks avoided the tower. While it seemed to stand on a hill, I realized as I approached that it would be more correct to say that the rocks had scooped out an enormous basin just short of it. I could not tell from my side, however, whether the effect was that of an island or a peninsula.

I dashed through the smoke and rubble, avoiding the jets of flame that leapt from the cracks and holes. Finally, I scrambled up the slope, removing myself from the courseway. Then, for several moments, I clung at a spot just below any line of sight from the tower. I checked my weapons, controlled my breathing and put on the goggles. Everything set, I went over the top and came up into a crouch.

Yes, the shades worked. And yes, the beast was waiting.

It was a fright all right, because in some ways it was kind of beautiful. It had a snake body as big around as a barrel, with a head sort of like a massive claw hammer, but kind of tapered to the snout end. Eyes of a very pale green. And it was clear as glass, with very faint, fine lines seeming to indicate scales. Whatever flowed in its veins was reasonably clear, also. You could look right into it and see its organs—opaque or cloudy as the case might be. You could almost be distracted by watching the thing function. And it had a dense mane, like bristles of glass—about the head and collaring its gullet. Its movement when it saw me, raised that head and slithered forward, was like flowing water—living water it seemed, a bedless river without banks. What almost froze me, though, was that I could see into its stomach. There was a partly digested man in it.

I raised the gun, aimed at the nearest eye and squeezed the trigger.

I already told you it didn't work. So I threw the gun, leaped to my left and sprang in on its right side, going for its eye with my blade.

You know how hard it can be to kill things built along reptilian lines. I decided immediately to try to blind the thing and hack off its tongue as the first order of business. Then, being more than a little fast on my feet, I might have any number of chances to lay in some good ones about the head until I decapitated it. Then let it tie itself in knots till it stopped. I was hoping, too, that it might be sluggish because it was still digesting someone.

If it was sluggish then, I was glad that I hadn't stopped by earlier. It drew its head out of the path of my blade and snapped down over it while I was still off balance. That snout glanced across my chest, and it felt as if I had been hit by a

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massive hammer. It knocked me sprawling.

I kept on rolling to get out of range, coming up short near the edge of the embankment. I recovered my footing there while it unwound itself, dragged a lot of weight in my direction and then reared up and cocked its head again, about fifteen feet above me.

I know damn well Gerard would have chosen that moment to attack. The big bastard would have strode forward with that monster blade of his and cut the thing in half. Then it would probably have fallen on him and writhed all over him, and he'd have come away with a few bruises. Maybe a bloody nose. Benedict would not have missed the eye. He would have had one in each pocket by then and be playing football with the head while composing a footnote to Clausewitz. But they are genuine hero types. Me, I just stood there holding the blade point upward, both hands on the hilt, my elbows on my hips, my head as far back out of the way as possible. I would much rather have run and called it a day. Only I knew that if I tried it, that head would drop down and smear me.

Cries from within the tower indicated that I had been spotted, but I was not about to look away to see what was going on. Then I began cursing the thing. I wanted it to strike and get it over with, one way or the other.

When it finally did, I shuffled my feet, twisted my body and swung the point into line with my target.

My left side was partly numbed by the blow, and I felt as if I had been driven a foot into the ground.

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Somehow, I managed to remain upright. Yes, I had done everything perfectly. The maneuver had gone exactly as I had hoped and planned.

Except for the beast's part. It wasn't cooperating by producing the appropriate death throes.

In fact, it was beginning to rise.

It took my blade with it, too. The hilt protruded from its left eye socket, the point emerged like another bristle amid the mane on the back of its head. I had a feeling that the offensive team had had it.

At that moment, figures began to emerge—slowly, cautiously—from an opening at the base of the tower. They were armed and ugly looking, and I had a feeling that they were not on my side of the disagreement.

Okay. I know when it is time to fold and hope for a better hand another day.

"Brand!" I shouted. "It's Random! I can't get through! Sorry!"

Then I turned, ran and leaped back over the edge, down into the place where the rocks did their unsettling things. I wondered whether I had chosen the best time to descend.

Like so many things, the answer was yes and no.

IT WAS not the sort of jump I would make for many reasons other than those which prevailed. I came down alive, but that seemed the most that could be said for it. I was stunned, and for a long while I thought I had broken my ankle.

The thing that got me moving again was a rustling sound from above and the rattle of gravel about me. When I readjusted the goggles and looked up, I saw that the beast had decided to come down and finish the job. It was winding its phantom way down the slope, the area about its head having darkened and opaqued since I had skewered it upstairs.

I sat up. I got to my knees. I tried my ankle, couldn't use it. Nothing around to serve as a crutch either. Okay. I crawled then. Away. What else was there to do? Gain as much ground as I could and think hard while I was about it.

Salvation was a rock—one of the smaller, slower ones, only about the size of a moving van. When I saw it approaching, it occurred to me that here was transportation if I could make it aboard. Maybe some safety, too. The faster, really massive ones appeared to get the most abuse.

This in mind, I watched the big ones that accompanied my own, estimated their paths and velocities, tried to gauge the movement of the entire system, readied myself for the moment, the effort. I also listened to the approach of the beast, heard the cries of the troops from the edge of the bluff, wondered whether anyone up there was giving odds on me and what they might be if they were.

When the time came I went. I got past the first big one without any trouble, but had to wait for the next one to go by. I took a chance in crossing the path of the final one. Had to, to make it in time.

I made it to the right spot at the right moment, caught on to the holds I had been eyeing and was dragged maybe twenty feet before I

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could pull myself up off the ground. Then I hauled my way to its uncomfortable top, sprawled there and looked back.

It had been close. Still was, for that matter, as the beast was pacing me, its one good eye following the spinning big ones.

From overhead, I heard a disappointed wail. Then the guys started down the slope, shouting what I took to be encouragement to the creature. I commenced massaging my ankle. I tried to relax. The brute crossed over, passing behind the first big rock as it completed another orbit.

How far could I shift through Shadow before it reached me? I wondered. True, there was constant movement, a changing of textures . . .

The thing waited for the second rock, slithered by behind it, paced me again, drew nearer.

Shadow, Shadow, on the wing . . .

The men were almost to the base of the slope by then. The beast was waiting for its opening—the next time around—past the inner satellite. I knew that it was capable of rearing high enough to snatch me from my perch . . .

. . . Come alive and smear that thing!

As I SPUN and glided, I caught hold of the stuff of Shadow, sank into the feel of it, worked with the textures, possible to probable to actual, felt it coming with the finest twist, gave it that necessary fillip at the appropriate moment . . .

It came in from the beast's blind side, of course. A big mother of a rock, careening along like a semi out of control . . .

It would have been more elegant to mash it between two of them. However, I hadn't the time for finesse. I simply ran it over and left it there, thrashing in the granite traffic.

Moments later, however, inexplicably, the mashed and mangled body rose suddenly above the ground and drifted skyward, twisting. It kept going, buffeted by the winds, dwindling, dwindling, gone.

My own rock bore me away, slowly, steadily. The entire pattern was drifting. The guys from the tower then went into a huddle and decided to pursue me. They moved away from the base of the slope, began to make their way across the plain. But this was no real problem, I felt. I would ride my stony mount through Shadow, leaving them worlds away. This was by far the easiest course of action open to me. They would doubtless have been more difficult to take by surprise than the beast. After all, this was their land; they were wary and unmaimed.

I removed the goggles and tested my ankle once more. I stood for a moment. It was very sore, but it bore my weight. I reclined once more and turned my thoughts to what had occurred. I had lost my blade and I was now in less than top shape. Rather than go on with the venture under these conditions, I knew that I was doing the safest, wisest thing by getting the hell out. I had gained enough knowledge of the layout and the conditions so that my chances would be better next time around. All right . . .

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The sky brightened above me, the colors and shadings lost something of their arbitrary, meandering habit. The flames began to subside about me. Good. Clouds started to find their ways across the sky. Excellent. Soon a localized glow began behind a cloudbank. Superb. When it went away, a sun would hang once again in the heavens.

I looked back and was surprised to see that I was still being pursued. However, it could easily be that I had not dealt properly with their analogues for this slice of Shadow. It is never good to assume that you have taken care of everything when you are in a hurry. So . . .

I shifted again. The rock gradually altered its course, shifted its shape, lost its satellites, moved in a straight line toward what was to become the west. Above me, the clouds dispersed and a pale sun shone down. We picked up speed. That should have taken care of everything right there. I had positively come into a different place.

But it had not. When I looked again, they were still coming. True, I had gained some distance on them. But the party trooped right along after me.

Well, all right. Things like that can sometimes happen. There were of course two possibilities. My mind still being more than a little disturbed from all that had just occurred, I had not performed ideally and had drawn them along with me. Or, I had maintained a constant where I should have suppressed a variable—that is, shifted into a place and unconsciously required that the pursuit element be present. Different guys then, but still chasing me.

I rubbed my ankle some more. The sun brightened toward orange. A wind out of the north raised a screen of dust and sand and hung it at my back, removing the gang from my sight. I raced on into the west, where a line of mountains had now grown up. Time was in a distortion phase. My ankle felt a little better.

I rested awhile. Mine was reasonably comfortable, as rocks go. No sense turning it into a hellride when everything seemed to be proceeding smoothly. I stretched out, hands behind my head, and watched the mountains draw nearer. I thought about Brand and the tower. That was the place all right. Everything was just as it had been in the glimpse he had given me. Except for the guards, of course. I decided that I would cut through the proper piece of Shadow, recruit a cohort of my own, then go back and give them hell. Yes, then everything would be fine . . .

After a time, I stretched, rolled over onto my stomach and looked back. Damned if they weren't still following me! They had even gained some.

Naturally, I got angry. To hell with flight! They were asking for it, and it was time they got it.

I rose to my feet. My ankle was only half-sore, a little numb. I raised my arms and looked for the shadows I wanted. I found them.

SLOWLY, the rock swung out from its straight course into an arc, turning off to the right. The curve tightened. I swung through a

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parabola and headed back toward them, my velocity gradually increasing as I went. No time to raise a storm at my back, though I thought that would have been a nice touch if I could have managed it.

As I swept down upon them—there were maybe two dozen—they prudently began to scatter. A number of them didn't make it, though. I swung through another curve and returned as soon as I could.

I was shaken by the sight of several corpses rising into the air, dripping gore, two of them already high above me.

I was almost upon them on that second pass when I realized that a few of them had jumped aboard the first time through. The first one over the edge drew his blade and rushed me. I blocked his arm, took the weapon away from him and threw him back down. I guess it was then that I became aware of those spurs on the backs of their hands. I had been slashed by his.

By that time, I was the target of a number of curiously shaped missiles from below, two more guys were coming over the edge and it looked as if several more might have made it aboard below.

Well, even Benedict sometimes retreats. I had at least given the survivors something to remember.

I let go the shadows, tore a barbed wheel from my side, another from my thigh, hacked off a guy's swordarm and kicked him in the stomach, dropped to my knees to avoid a wild swing from the next guy and caught him across the legs with my riposte. He went over, too.

There were five more on the way up and we were sailing westward once again, leaving perhaps a dozen live ones to regroup on the sand at my back, a sky full of oozing drifters above them.

I had the advantage with the next fellow because I caught him just partway over the edge. So much for him, and then there were four.

While I had been dealing with him though, three more had arisen, simultaneously, at three different points.

I rushed the nearest and dispatched him, but the other two made it over and were upon me while I was about it. As I defended myself from their attack, the final one came up and joined them.

They were not all that good, but it was getting crowded and there were a lot of points and sharp edges straying about me. I kept parrying and moving, trying to get them to block one another, get in each other's way. I was partly successful, and when I had the best lineup I thought I was going to get, I rushed them, taking a couple cuts—I had to lay myself open a bit to do it—but splitting one skull for my pains. He went over the edge and took the second one with him in a tangle of limbs and gear.

Unfortunately, the inconsiderate lout had carried off my blade, snagged in some boney cleft or other he had chosen to interpose when I swung. It was obviously my day for losing blades, and I wondered if my horoscope would have mentioned it if I had thought to look before I'd set out.

Anyhow, I moved quickly to avoid the final guy's swing. In

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doing so, I slipped on some blood and went skidding toward the front of the rock. If I went down that way, it would plow right over me, leaving a very flat Random there, like an exotic rug, to puzzle and delight future wayfarers.

I clawed for handholds as I slid, and the guys took a couple quick steps toward me, raising his blade to do unto me as I had his buddy.

I caught hole of his ankle though, and it did the trick of braking me very nicely—and damned if someone shouldn't choose that moment to try to get hold of me via the Trumps.

"I'm busy!" I shouted. "Call back later!" and my own motion was arrested as the guy toppled, clattered and went sliding by.

I tried to reach him before he fell to rugdom, but I was not quite quick enough. I had wanted to save him for questioning. Still, my unegged beer was more than satisfactory. I headed back top and center to observe and muse.

The survivors were still following me, but I had a sufficient lead. I did not at the moment have to worry about another boarding party. Good enough. I was headed toward the mountains once again. The sun I had conjured was beginning to bake me. I was soaked with sweat and blood. My wounds were giving me trouble. I was thirsty. Soon, soon, I decided, it would have to rain. Take care of that before anything else.

So I began the preliminaries to a shift in that direction: clouds massing behind the mountains, building, darkening . . .

I drifted off somewhere along the line, had a disjointed dream of someone trying to reach me again but not making it. Sweet darkness.

I AWAKENED to the rain, sudden and hard-driving. I could not tell whether the darkness in the sky was from storm, evening or both. It was cooler, though, and I spread my cloak and just lay there with my mouth open. Periodically, I wrung moisture from the cloak. My thirst was eventually slaked and I began feeling clean again. The rock had also become so slick-looking that I was afraid to move about on it. The mountains were much nearer, their peaks lined by frequent lightnings. Things were too dark in the opposite direction for me to tell whether my pursuers were still with me. It would have been pretty rough trekking for them to have kept up, but then it is seldom good policy to rely on assumptions when traveling through strange shadows. I was a bit irritated with myself for going to sleep, but since no harm had come of it I drew my soggy cloak about me and decided to forgive myself. I felt around for some cigarettes I had brought along and found that about half of them had survived. After the eighth try, I juggled shadows just enough to get a light. Then I just sat there, smoking and being rained on. It was a good feeling and I didn't move to change anything else, not for hours.

When the storm finally let up and the sky came clear, it was a night full of strange constellations. Beautiful though, the way nights can be on the desert. Much later, I detected a gentle upward sloping and my rock began to slow. Some-

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thing began to happen in terms of whatever physical rules controlled the situation. I mean, the slope itself did not seem so pronounced that it would affect our velocity as radically as it had. I did not want to tamper with Shadow in a direction that would probably take me out of my way. I wanted to get back onto more familiar turf as soon as possible—find my way to a place where my gut anticipations of physical events had more of a chance of being correct.

So I let the rock grind to a halt, climbed down when it did and continued on up the slope, hiking. As I went, I played the Shadow game we all learned as children. Pass some obstruction—a scrawny tree, a stand of stone—and have the sky be different from one side to the other. Gradually, I restored familiar constellations. I knew that I would be climbing down a different mountain from the one I ascended. My wounds still throbbed dully, but my ankle had stopped bothering me except for a little stiffness. I was rested. I knew that I could go for a long while. Everything seemed to be all right again.

It was a long hike, up the gradually steepening way. But I hit a trail eventually, and that made things easier. I trudged steadily upward under the now familiar skies, determined to keep moving and make it across by morning. As I went, my garments altered to fit the shadow—denim trousers and jacket now, my wet cloak a dry serape. I heard an owl nearby, and from a great distance below and behind came what might have been the yip-yip-howl of a coyote. These signs of a more familiar place made me feel somewhat secure, exorcised any vestiges of desperation that remained with my flight.

An hour or so later, I yielded to the temptation to play with Shadow just a bit. It was not all that improbable for a stray horse to be wandering in these hills, and of course I found him. After ten or so minutes of becoming friendly, I was mounted bareback and moving toward the top of the trail in a more congenial fashion. The wind sowed frost in our path. The moon came and sparked it to life.

To be brief, I rode all night, passing over the crest and commencing my downward passage well before dawn. As I descended, the mountain grew even more vast above me, which of course was the best time for this to occur. Things were green on this side of the range, and divided by neat highways, punctuated by occasional dwellings. Everything therefore was proceeding in accordance with my desire.

Early morning. I was into the foothills and my denim had turned to Khaki and a bright shirt. I had a light sport jacket slung before me. At a great height, a jet liner poked holes in the air, moving from horizon to horizon. There were birdsongs about me, and the day was mild, sunny.

It was about then that I heard my name spoken and felt the touch of the Trump once more. I drew up short and responded.

"Yes?"

IT WAS JULIAN.

"Random, where are you?" he asked.

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"Pretty far from Amber," I replied. "Why?"

"Have any of the others been in touch with you?"

"Not recently," I said. "But someone did try to get hold of me yesterday. I was busy though, and couldn't talk."

"That was me," he said. "We have a situation here that you had better know about."

"Where are you?" I asked.

"In Amber. A number of things have happened recently."

"Like what?"

"Dad has been gone now for an unusually long time. No one knows where."

"He's done that before."

"But not without leaving instructions and making delegations. He always provided them in the past."

"True," I said. "But how long is 'long'?"

"Well over a year. You weren't aware of this at all?"

"I knew that he was gone. Gerard mentioned it some time back."

"Then add more time to that."

"I get the idea. How have you been operating?"

"That is the problem. We have simply been dealing with affairs as they arise. Gerard and Caine had been running the navy anyway, on Dad's orders. Without him, they have been making all their own decisions. I took charge of the patrols in Arden again. There is no central authority though, to arbitrate, to make policy decisions, to speak for all of Amber."

"So we need a regent. We can cut cards for it, I suppose."

"It is not that simple. We think Dad is dead."

"Dead? Why? How?"

"We have tried to raise him on his Trump. We have been trying every day for over half a year now. Nothing. What do you think?"

I nodded.

"He may be dead," I said. "You'd think he would have come across with something. Still, the possibility of his being in some trouble—say, a prisoner somewhere—is not precluded."

"A cell can't stop the Trumps. Nothing can. He would call for help the minute we made contact."

"I can't argue with that," I said. But I thought of Brand as I said it. "Perhaps he is deliberately resisting contact, though."

"What for?"

"I have no idea, but it is possible. You know how secretive he is about some things."

"No," Julian said, "it doesn't hold up. He would have given some operating instructions, somewhere along the line."

"Well, whatever the reasons, whatever the situation, what do you propose doing now?"

"Someone has to occupy the throne," he said.

I had seen it coming throughout the entire dialogue, of course—the opportunity it had long seemed would never come to pass.

"Who?" I asked.

"Eric seems the best choice," he replied. "Actually, he has been acting in that capacity for months now. It simply becomes a matter of formalizing it."

"Not just as regent?"

"Not just as regent."

"I see . . . Yes, I guess that

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things have been happening in my absence. What about Benedict as a choice?"

"He seems to be happy where he is, off somewhere in Shadow."

"What does he think of the whole idea?"

"He is not entirely in favor of it. But we do not believe he will offer resistance. It would disrupt things too much."

"I see," I said again. "And Bleys?"

"He and Eric had some rather heated discussions of the issue, but the troops do not take their orders from Bleys. He left Amber about three months ago. He could cause some trouble later. But then, we are forewarned."

"Gerard? Caine?"

"They will go along with Eric. I was wondering about yourself?"

"What about the girls?"

He shrugged.

"They tend to take things lying down. No problem."

"I don't suppose Corwin . . ."

"Nothing new. He's dead. We all know it. His monument has been gathering dust and ivy for centuries. If not, then he has intentionally divorced himself from Amber forever. Nothing there. Now I am wondering where you stand."

I chuckled.

"I am hardly in a position to possess forceful opinions," I said.

"We need to know, now."

I nodded.

"I have always been able to detect the quarter of the wind," I said. "I do not sail against it."

He smiled and returned my nod.

"Very good," he said.

"When is the coronation? I assume that I am invited."

"Of course, of course. But the date has not yet been set. There are still a few minor matters to be dealt with. As soon as the affair is calendared, one of us will contact you again."

"Thank you, Julian."

"Good-bye for now, Random."

And I sat there being troubled for a long while before I started on downward again. How long had Eric spent engineering it? I wondered. Much of the politicking back in Amber could have been done pretty quickly, but the setting up of the situation in the first place seemed the product of long-term thinking and planning. I was naturally suspicious as to his involvement in Brand's predicament. I also could not help but give some thought to the possibility of his having had a hand in Dad's disappearance. That would have taken some doing and have required a really foolproof trap. But the more I thought of it, the less I was willing to put it past him. I even dredged up some old speculations as to his part in your own passing, Corwin. But offhand, I could not think of a single thing to do about any of it. Go along with it, I figured, if that's where the power was. Stay in his good graces.

Still . . . One should always get more than one angle on a story. I tried to make up my mind as to who would give me a good one. While I was thinking along these lines, something caught my eye as I glanced back and up, appreciating anew the heights from which I had not quite descended.

There were a number of riders up

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near the top. They had apparently traversed the same trail I had taken. I could not get an exact nose count, but it seemed suspiciously close to a dozen—a fairly sizeable group to be out riding at just that place and time. As I saw that they were proceeding on down the same way that I had come, I had a prickly feeling along the base of my neck. What if? What if they were the same guys? Because I felt that they were.

Individually, they were no match for me. Even a couple of them together had not made that great a showing. That was not it. The real chiller was that if that's who it was, then we were not alone in our ability to travel through Shadow. It meant that someone else was capable of a stunt that for all my life I had thought to be the sole property of our family. Add to this the fact that they were Brand's wardens, and their designs on the family—at least part of it—did not look all that clement. I perspired suddenly at the notion of enemies who could match our greatest power.

OF COURSE, they were too far off for me to really know just then whether that was truly who it was. But you have to explore every contingency if you want to keep winning the survival game. Could Eric have found or trained or created some special beings to serve him in this particular capacity? Along with you and Eric, Brand had one of the firmest claims on the succession. —Not to take anything away from your case, damn it! Hell! You know what I mean. I have to talk about it to show you how I w. thinking at the time. That's all. —So, Brand had had the basis for a pretty good claim if he had been in a position to press it. You being out of the picture, he was Eric's chief rival when it came to adding a legal touch to things. Putting that together with his plight and the ability of those guys to traverse Shadow, Eric came to look a lot more sinister to me. I was more scared by that thought than I was by the riders themselves, though they did not exactly fill me with delight. I decided that I had better do several things quickly: talk to someone else in Amber, and have him take me through the Trump.

Okay. I decided quickly. Gerard seemed the safest choice. He is reasonably open, neutral. Honest about most things. And from what Julian had said, Gerard's role in the whole business seemed kind of passive. That is, he was not going to resist Eric's move actively. He would not want to cause a lot of trouble. Didn't mean he approved. He was probably just being safe and conservative old Gerard. That decided, I reached for my deck of Trumps and almost howled. They were gone.

I searched every pocket in every garment about me. I had taken them along when I'd left Texorami. I could have lost them at any point in the previous day's action. I had certainly been battered and thrown about a lot. And it had been a great day for losing things. I composed a complicated litany of curses and dug my heels into the horse's sides. I was going to have to move fast and think faster now. The first

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thing would be to get into a nice, crowded, civilized place where an assassin of the more primitive sort would be at a disadvantage.

As I hurried downhill, heading for one of the roads, I worked with the stuff of Shadow—quite subtly this time, using every bit of skill I could muster. There were just two things I desired at the moment: a final assault on my possible trackers and a fast path to a place of sanctuary.

The world shimmered and did a final jig, becoming the California I had been seeking. A rasping, growling noise reached my ears, for the final touch I had intended. Looking back, I saw a section of cliff face come loose, almost in slow motion, and slide directly toward the horsemen. Awhile later, I had dismounted and was walking in the direction of the road, my garments even fresher and of better quality. I was uncertain as to the time of year, and I wondered what the weather was like in New York.

Before very long, the bus that I had anticipated approached and I flagged it down. I located a window seat, smoked for awhile and watched the countryside. After a time, I dozed.

I did not awaken until early afternoon, when we pulled into a terminal. I was ravenous by then, and decided I had better have something to eat before getting a cab for the airport. So I bought three cheeseburgers and a couple malts with a few of my quondam Texorami greenbacks. Getting served and eating took me maybe twenty minutes. Leaving the snack bar, I saw that there were a number of taxis standing idle at the stand out front. Before I picked one up though, I decided to make an important stop in the men's room.

At the very damndest moment you can think of, six stalls flew open behind my back and their occupants rushed me. There was no mistaking the spurs on the backs of their hands, the oversized jaws, the smouldering eyes. Not only had they caught up with me, they were now clad in the same acceptable garb as anyone else in the neighborhood. Gone were any remaining doubts as to their power over Shadow.

Fortunately, one of them was faster than the others. Also, perhaps because of my size, they still might not have been fully aware of my strength. I seized that first one high up on the arm, avoiding those hand bayonets he sported, pulled him over in front of me, picked him up and threw him at the others. Then I just turned and ran. I broke the door on the way out. I didn't even pause to zip up until I was in a taxi and had the driver burning rubber.

Enough. It was no longer simple sanctuary that I had in mind. I wanted to get hold of a set of Trumps and tell someone else in the family about those guys. If they were Eric's creatures, the others ought to be made aware of them. If they were not, then Eric ought to be told, too. If they could make their way through Shadow, perhaps others could, also. Whatever they represented might one day constitute a threat to Amber herself. Supposing—just supposing—that no one back home was involved? What

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if Dad and Brand were the victims of a totally unsuspected enemy? Then there was something big and menacing afoot, and I had stepped right into it. That would be an excellent reason for their hounding me this thoroughly. They would want me pretty badly. My mind ran wild. They might even be harrying me toward some sort of a trap. No need for the visible ones to be the only ones about.

I brought my emotions to heel. One by one, you must deal with those things that come to hand, I told myself. That is all. Divorce the feelings from the speculations, or at least provide for separate maintenance. This is sister Flora's shadow. She lives on the other edge of the continent in a place called Westchester. Get to a phone, get hold of information and call her. Tell her it is urgent and ask for sanctuary. She can't refuse you that, even if she does hate your guts. Then jump a jet and get the hell out there. Speculate on the way if you want, but keep cool now.

So I telephoned from the airport and you answered it, Corwin. That was the variable that broke all the possible equations I had been juggling—you suddenly showing up at that time, that place, that point in events. I grabbed for it when you offered me protection, and not just because I wanted protection. I could probably have taken those six guys out by myself. But that was no longer it. *I thought they were yours.* I figured you had been lying low all along, waiting for the right moment to move in. Now, I thought, you were ready. This explains everything. You had taken out Brand and you were about to use your Shadow-walking zombies for purposes of going back and catching Eric with his pants down. I wanted to be on your side because I hated Eric and because I knew you were a careful planner and you usually get what you go after. I mentioned the pursuit by guys out of Shadow to see what you would say. The fact that you said nothing didn't really prove anything, though. Either you were being cagey, I figured, or you had no way of knowing where I had been. I also thought of the possibility of walking into a trap of your devising, but I was already in trouble and did not see that I was that important to the balance of power that you would want to dispose of me. Especially if I offered my support, which I was quite willing to do. So I flew on out. And damned if those six didn't board later and follow me. Is he giving me an escort? I wondered. Better not start making more assumptions. I shook them again when we landed and headed for Flora's place. Then I acted as if none of my guesses had occurred, waiting to see what you would do. When you helped me dispose of the guys, I was really puzzled. Were you genuinely surprised, or was it a put-on, with you sacrificing a few of the troops to keep me ignorant of something? All right, I decided, be ignorant, cooperate, see what he has in mind. I was a perfect setup for that act you pulled to cover the condition of your memory. When I did learn the truth, it was simply too late. We were headed for Rebma and none of this would have meant anything to you. Later, I didn't care to tell

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Eric anything after his coronation. I was his prisoner then and not exactly kindly disposed toward him. It even occurred to me that my information might be worth something one day—at least, my freedom again—if that threat ever materialized. As for Brand, I doubt anyone would have believed me; and even if someone did, I was the only one who knew how to reach that shadow. Could you see Eric buying that as a reason for releasing me? He would have laughed and told me to come up with a better story. And I never heard from Brand again. None of the others seem to have heard from his either. Odds are he's dead by now—I'd say. And that is the story I never got to tell you. You figure out what it all means.

III

I STUDIED Random, remembering what a great card player he was. By looking at his face, I could no more tell whether he was lying, in whole or in part, than I could learn by scrutinizing the Jack of, say, Diamonds. Nice touch, that part, too. There was enough of that kind of business to his story to give it some feel of verisimilitude.

"To paraphrase Oedipus, Hamlet, Lear and all those guys," I said, "I wish I had known this some time ago."

"This was the first chance I really had to tell you," he said.

"True," I agreed. "Unfortunately, it not only fails to clarify things, it complicates the puzzle even more. Which is no mean trick. Here we are with a black road

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running up to the foot of Kolvir. It passes through Shadow, and things have succeeded in traversing it to beset Amber. We do not know the exact nature of the forces behind it, but they are obviously malign and they seem to be growing in strength. I have been feeling guilty about it for some while now, because I see it as being tied in with my curse. Yes, I laid one on us. Curse or no curse though, everything eventually resolves into some sort of tangibility that can be combated. Which is exactly what we are going to do. But all week long, I have been trying to figure out Dara's part in things. Who is she really? What is she? Why was she so anxious to try the Pattern? How is it that she managed to succeed? And that final threat of hers . . . 'Amber will be destroyed,' she said. It seems more than coincidental that this occurred at the same time as the attack over the black road. I do not see it as a separate thing, but as a part of the same cloth. And it all seems to be tied in with the fact that there is a traitor somewhere here in Amber—Caine's death, the notes . . . Someone here is either abetting an external enemy or is behind the whole thing himself. Now you link it all up with Brand's disappearance, by way of this guy." I nudged the corpse with my foot. "It makes it look as if Dad's death or absence is also a part of it. If that is the case, though, it makes for a major conspiracy—with detail after detail having been carefully worked out over a period of years."

Random explored a cupboard in the corner, produced a bottle and a pair of goblets. He filled them and brought me one, then returned to his chair. We drank a silent toast to futility.

"Well," he said, "plotting is the number one pastime around here, and everyone *has* had plenty of time, you know. We are both too young to remember brothers Osric and Finndo, who died for the good of Amber. But the impression I get from talking with Benedict—"

"Yes," I said, "—that they had done more than wishful thinking about the throne, and it became necessary that they die bravely for Amber. I've heard that, too. Maybe so, maybe not. We'll never know for sure. Still . . . Yes, the point is well taken, though almost unnecessary. I do not doubt that it has been tried before. I do not put it past a number of us. Who, though? We will be operating under a severe handicap until we find out. Any move that we make externally will probably only be directed against a limb of the beast. Come up with an idea."

"Corwin," he said, "to be frank about it, I could make a case for it being anyone here—even myself, prisoner status and all. In fact, something like that would be a great blind for it. I would have taken genuine delight in looking helpless while actually pulling the strings that made all the others dance. Any of us would, though. We all have our motives, our ambitions. And over the years, we all have had time and opportunity to lay a lot of groundwork. No, that is the wrong way to go about it, looking for suspects. Everyone here falls into that category. Let us decide in-

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stead what it is that would distinguish such an individual, aside from motives, apart from opportunities. I would say, let's look at the methods involved."

"All right. Then you start."

"Some one of us knows more than the rest of us about the workings of Shadow—the ins and the outs, the whys and the hows. He also has allies, obtained from somewhere fairly far afield. This is the combination he has brought to bear upon Amber. Now, we have no way of looking at a person and telling whether he possesses such special knowledge and skills. But let us consider where he could have obtained them. It could be that he simply learned something off in Shadow somewhere, on his own. Or he could have been studying all along, here, while Dworkin was still alive and willing to give lessons."

I stared down into my glass. Dworkin could *still* be living. He had provided my means of escape from the dungeons of Amber—how long ago? I had told no one this, and was not about to. For one thing, Dworkin was quite mad—which was apparently why Dad had had him locked away. For another, he had demonstrated powers I did not understand, which convinced me he could be quite dangerous. Still, he had been kindly disposed toward me after a minimum of flattery and reminiscence. If he were still around, I suspected that with a bit of patience I might be able to handle him. So I had kept the whole business locked away in my mind as a possible secret weapon. I saw no reason for changing that decision at this point.

"Brand did hang around him a lot," I acknowledged, finally seeing what he was getting at. "He was interested in things of that sort."

"Exactly," Random replied. "And he obviously knew more than the rest of us, to be able to send me that message without a Trump."

"You think he made a deal with outsiders, opened the way for them, then discovered that they no longer needed him when they hung him out to dry?"

"Not necessarily. Though I suppose that is possible, too. My thinking runs more like this—and I don't deny my prejudice in his favor: I think he had learned enough about the subject so that he was able to detect it when someone did something peculiar involving the Trumps, the Pattern or that area of Shadow most adjacent to Amber. Then he slipped up. Perhaps he underestimated the culprit and confronted him directly, rather than going to Dad or Dworkin. What then? The guilty party subdued him and imprisoned him in that tower. Either he thought enough of him not to want to kill him if he did not have to, or he had some later use of him in mind."

"You make that sound plausible, too," I said, and I would have added, "and it fits your story nicely" and watched his poker face again, except for one thing. Back when I was with Bleys, before our attack on Amber, I had had a momentary contact with Brand while fooling with the Trumps. He had indicated distress, imprisonment, and then the contact had been broken. So Random's story fit, to that extent. So, instead, I said, "If

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he can point the finger, we have got to get him back and set him to pointing."

"I was hoping you would say that," Random replied. "I hate to leave a bit of business like that unfinished."

I WENT and fetched the bottle, refilled our glasses. I sipped. I lit another cigarette.

"Before we get into that, though," I said, "I have to decide on the best way of breaking the news about Caine. Where is Flora anyway?"

"Down in town, I think. She was here this morning. I can find her for you, I'm pretty sure."

"Do it, then. She is the only other one I know of who has seen one of these guys, back when they broke into her place in Westchester. We might as well have her handy for that much corroboration as to their nastiness. Besides, I have some other things I want to ask her."

He swallowed his drink and rose.

"All right. I'll go do that now. Where should I bring her?"

"My quarters. If I'm not there, wait."

He nodded.

I rose and accompanied him into the hall.

"Have you got the key to this room?" I asked.

"It's on a hook inside."

"Better get it and lock up. We wouldn't want a premature unveiling."

He did that and gave me the key. I walked with him as far as the first landing and saw him on his way. Then I headed for my own quarters.

From my safe, I removed the Jewel of Judgment, a ruby pendant which had given Dad and Eric control over the weather in the vicinity of Amber. Before he died, Eric had told me the procedure to be followed in tuning it to my own use. I had not had time to do it though, and did not really have the time now. But during my conversation with Random I had decided that I was going to have to take the time. I had located Dworkin's notes, beneath a stone near Eric's fireplace. He had given me that much information also, that last time. I would have liked to know where he had come across the notes in the first place though, for they were incomplete. I fetched them from the rear of the safe and regarded them once again. They did agree with Eric's explanation as to how the attunement was to be managed.

But they also indicated that the stone had other uses, that the control of meteorological phenomena was almost an incidental, though spectacular demonstration of a complex of principles which underlay the Pattern, the Trumps and the physical integrity of Amber herself, apart from Shadow. Unfortunately, the details were lacking. Still, the more that I searched my memory, the more something along these lines did seem indicated. Only rarely had Dad produced the stone; and though he had spoken of it as a weather-changer, the weather had not always been especially altered on those occasions when he had sported it. And he had often taken it along with him on his

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little trips. So I was ready to believe there was more to it than that. Eric had probably reasoned the same way, but he had not been able to dope out its other uses either. He had simply taken advantage of its obvious powers when Bleys and I had attacked Amber; and he had used it the same way this past week when the creatures had made their assault from the black road. It had served him well on both occasions, even if it had not been sufficient to save his life. So I had better get hold of its power myself, I decided, now. Any extra edge was important. And it would be good to be seen wearing the thing, too, I judged. Especially now.

I put the notes back into the safe, the jewel in my pocket. I left then and headed downstairs. Again, as before, to walk those halls made me feel as if I had never been away. This was home, this was what I wanted. Now I was its defender. I did not even wear the crown, yet all its problems had become my own. It was ironic. I had come back to claim the crown, to wrest it from Eric, to hold the glory, to reign. Now, suddenly, things were falling apart. It had not taken long to realize that Eric had behaved incorrectly. If he had indeed done Dad in, he had no right to the crown. If he had not, then he had acted prematurely. Either way, the coronation had served only to fatten his already obese ego. Myself, I wanted it and I knew that I could take it. But it would be equally irresponsible to do so with my troops quartered in Amber, suspicion of Caine's murder about to descend upon me, the first signs of a fantastic plot suddenly displayed before me and the continuing possibility that Dad was still alive. On several occasions, it seemed we had been in contact, briefly—and on one such, years ago, that he had okayed my succession. But there was so much deceit and trickery afoot that I did not know what to believe. He had not abdicated. Also, I had had a head injury, and I was well aware of my own desires. The mind is a funny place. I do not even trust my own. Could it be that I had manufactured that whole business? A lot had happened since. The price of being an Amberite, I suppose, is that you cannot even trust yourself. I wondered what Freud would have said? While he had failed to pierce my amnesia, he had come up with some awfully good guesses as to what my father had been like, what our relationship had been, even though I had not realized it at the time. I wished that I could have one more session with him.

I made my way through the marble dining hall and into the dark, narrow corridor that lay behind. I nodded to the guard and walked on back to the door. Through it then, out onto the platform, across and down. The interminable spiral stairway that leads into the guts of Kolvir. Walking. Lights every now and then. Blackness beyond.

IT SEEMED that a balance had shifted somewhere along the way, and that I was no longer acting but being acted upon, being forced to move, to respond. Being herded. And each move led to an-

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other. Where had it all begun? Maybe it had been going on for years and I was only just now becoming aware of it. Perhaps we were all victims, in a fashion and to a degree none of us had realized. Great victuals for morbid thought. Sigmund, where are you now? I had wanted to be king—still wanted to be king—more than anything else. Yet the more I learned and the more I thought about what I had learned, the more all of my movements actually seemed to amount to Amber Pawn to King Four. I realized then that this feeling had been present for some time, growing, and I did not like it at all. But nothing that has ever lived has gotten by without making some mistake, I consoled myself. If my feeling represented actuality, my personal Pavlov was getting closer to my fangs with each ringing of the bell. Soon now, soon, I felt that it had to be soon, I would have to see that he came very near. Then it would be mine to see that he neither went away nor ever came again.

Turning, turning, around and down, light here, light there, these my thoughts, like thread on a spool, winding or unwinding, hard to be sure. Below me the sound of metal against stone. A guard's scabbard, the guard rising. A ripple of light from a lantern raised.

"Lord Corwin . . ."

"Jamie."

At bottom, I took a lantern from the shelf. Putting a light to it, I turned and headed toward the tunnel, pushing the darkness on ahead of me, a step at a time.

Eventually the tunnel, and so up it, counting side passages. It was the seventh that I wanted. Echoes and shadows. Must and dust.

Coming to it, then. Turning there. Not too much farther.

Finally, that great, dark metal-bound door. I unlocked it and pushed hard. It creaked, resisted, finally moved inward.

I set the lantern down, just to the right, inside. I had no further need of it, as the Pattern itself gave off sufficient light for what I had to do.

For a moment, I regarded the Pattern—a shining mass of curved lines that tricked the eye as it tried to trace them—imbedded there, huge, in the floor's slick blackness. It had given me power over Shadow, it had restored most of my memory. It would also destroy me in an instant if I were to essay it improperly. What gratitude the prospect did arouse in me was therefore not untinged with fear. It was a splendid and cryptic old family heirloom which belonged right where it was, in the cellar.

I moved off to the corner where the tracery began. There I composed my mind, relaxed my body and set my left foot upon the Pattern. Without pausing, I strode forward then and felt the current begin. Blue sparks outlined my boots. Another step. There was an audible crackling this time and the beginning of resistance. I took the first curvelength, striving to hurry, wanting to reach the First Veil as quickly as possible. By the time that I did, my hair was stirring and the sparks were brighter, longer.

The strain increased. Each step required more effort than the pre-

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vious one. The crackling grew louder and the current intensified. My hair rose and I shook off sparks. I kept my eyes on the fiery line and did not stop pushing.

Suddenly the pressure abated. I staggered but kept moving. I was through the First Veil and into the feeling of accomplishment that entailed. I recalled the last time that I had come this way, in Rebma, the city under the sea. The maneuver I had just completed was what had started the return of my memories. Yes. I pushed ahead and the sparks grew and the currents rose once again, setting my flesh to tingling.

THE SECOND VEIL . . . The angles . . . It always seemed to tax the strength to its limits, to produce the feeling that one's entire being was transformed into pure Will. It was a driving, relentless sensation. At the moment, the negotiation of the Pattern was the only thing in the world that meant anything to me. I had always been there, striving, never been away, always would be there, contending, my will against the maze of power. Time had vanished. Only the tension held.

The sparks were up to my waist. I entered the Grand Curve and fought my way along it. I was continually destroyed and reborn at every step of its length, baked by the fires of creation, chilled by the cold at entropy's end.

Out and onward, turning. Three more curves, a straight line, a number of arcs. Dizziness, a sensation of fading and intensifying as though I were oscillating into and out of existence. Turn after turn after turn after turn . . . A short, sharp arc . . . The line that led to the Final Veil . . . I imagine I was gasping and drenched with sweat by then. I never seem to remember for sure. I could hardly move my feet. The sparks were up to my shoulders. They came into my eyes and I lost sight of the Pattern itself between blinks. In, out, in, out . . . There it was. I dragged my right foot forward, knowing how Benedict must have felt, his legs snared by the black grass. Right before I rabbit-punched him. I felt bludgeoned myself—all over. Left foot, forward . . . So slowly it was hard to be certain it was actually moving. My hands were blue flames, my legs pillars of fire. Another step. Another. Yet another.

I felt like a slowly animated statue, a thawing snowman, a buckling girder . . . Two more . . . Three . . . Glacial, my movements, but I who directed them had all of eternity and a perfect constancy of will that would be realized . . .

I passed through the Veil. A short arc followed. Three steps to cross it into blackness and peace. They were the worst of all.

A coffee break for Sisyphus! That was my first thought as I departed the Pattern. *I've done it again!* was my second. And, *Never again!* was my third.

I allowed myself the luxury of a few deep breaths and a little shaking. Then I unpocketed the jewel and raised it by its chain. I held it before my eye.

Red inside, of course—a deep cherry-red, smoke-shot, fulgent. It seemed to have picked up something extra of light and glitter

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during the trip through the Pattern. I continued to stare, thinking over the instructions, comparing them with things I already knew.

Once you have walked the Pattern and reached this point, you can cause it to transport you to any place that you can visualize. All that it takes is the desire and an act of will. Such being the case, I was not without a moment's trepidation. If the effect proceeded as it normally did, I could be throwing myself into a peculiar sort of trap. But Eric had succeeded. He had not been locked into the heart of a gem somewhere off in Shadow. The Dworkin who had written those notes had been a great man, and I had trusted him.

Composing my mind, I intensified my scrutiny of the stone's interior.

There was a distorted reflection of the Pattern within it, surrounded by winking points of light, tiny flares and flashes, different curves and paths. I made my decision, I focused my will . . .

REDNESS and slow motion. Like sinking into an ocean of high viscosity. Very slowly, at first. Drifting and darkening, all the pretty lights far, far ahead. Faintly, my apparent velocity increased. Flakes of light, distant, intermittent. A trifle faster then, it seemed. No scale. I was a point of consciousness of indeterminate dimensions. Aware of movement, aware of the configuration toward which I advanced, now almost rapidly. The redness was nearly gone, as was the consciousness of any medium. Resistance vanished. I was speeding. All of this, now, seemed to have taken but a single instant, was still taking that same instant. There was a peculiar timeless quality to the entire affair. My velocity relative to what now seemed my target was enormous. The little, twisted maze was growing, was resolving into what appeared a three-dimensional variation of the Pattern itself. Punctuated by flares of colored light, it grew before me, still reminiscent of a bizarre galaxy half-ravelled in the middle of the ever-night, haloed with a pale shine of dust, its streamers composed of countless flickering points. And it grew or I shrank, or it advanced or I advanced, and we were near, near together, and it filled all of space now, top to bottom, this way to that, and my personal velocity still seemed, if anything, to be increasing. I was caught, overwhelmed by the blaze, and there was a stray streamer which I knew to be the beginning. I was too close—lost, actually—to apprehend its overall configuration any longer, but the buckling, the flickering, the weaving of all that I could see of it, everywhere about me, made me wonder whether three dimensions were sufficient to account for the senses warping complexities with which I was confronted. Rather than my galactic analogy, something in my mind shifted to the other extreme, suggesting the infinitely dimensioned Hilbert space of the subatomic. But then, it was a metaphor of desperation. Truly and simply, I did not understand anything about it. I had only a growing feeling—Pattern-conditioned? Instinctive?—that I had to

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pass through this maze also to gain the new degree of power that I sought.

Nor was I incorrect. I was swept on into it without any slackening of my apparent velocity. I was spun and whirled along blazing ways, passing through substanceless clouds of glitter and shine. There were no areas of resistance, as in the Pattern itself, my initial impetus seeming sufficient to bear me throughout. A whirlwind tour of the Milky Way? A drowning man swept among canyons of coral? An insomniac sparrow passing over an amusement park of a July Fourth evening? These my thoughts, as I recapitulated my recent passage in this transformed fashion.

. . . And out, through, over and done, in a blaze of ruddy light that found me regarding myself holding the pendant beside the Pattern, then regarding the pendant, Pattern within it, within me, everything within me, me within it, the redness subsiding, down, gone. Then just me, the pendant, the Pattern, alone, subject-object relationships reestablished—only an octave higher, which is about the best way I feel there is to put it. For a certain empathy now existed. It was as though I had acquired an extra sense, and an additional means of expression. It was a peculiar sensation, satisfying.

Anxious to test it, I summoned my resolve once again and commanded the Pattern to transport me elsewhere.

I stood then in the round room, atop the highest tower in Amber. Crossing it, I passed outside, onto a very small balcony. The contrast was powerful, coming so close to the super-sensory voyage I had just completed. For several long moments, I simply stood there, looking.

The sea was a study in textures, as the sky was partly overcast and getting on toward evening. The clouds themselves showed patterns of soft brightness and rough shading. The wind made its way seaward, so that the salt smell was temporarily denied me. Dark birds dotted the air, swinging and hovering at a great distance out over the water. Below me, the palace yards and the terraces of the city lay spread in enduring elegance out to Kolvic's rim. People were tiny on the thoroughfares, their movements discountable. I felt very alone.

Then I touched the pendant and called for a storm.

IV

RANDOM and Flora were waiting in my quarters when I returned. Random's eyes went first to the pendant, then to my own. I nodded.

I turned toward Flora, bowing slightly.

"Sister," I said, "it has been awhile, and then awhile."

She looked somewhat frightened, which was all to the good. She smiled and took my hand, though.

"Brother," she said. "I see that you have kept your word."

Pale gold, her hair. She had cut it, but retained the bangs. I could not decide whether I liked it that way or not. She had very lovely hair. Blue eyes, too, and tons of

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vanity to keep everything in her favorite perspective. At times she seemed to behave quite stupidly, but then at other times I have wondered.

"Excuse me for staring," I said, "but the last time that we met I was unable to see you."

"I am very happy that the situation has been corrected," she said. "It was quite— There was nothing that I could do, you know."

"I know," I said, recalling the occasional lilt of her laughter from the other side of the darkness on one of the anniversaries of the event. "I know."

I moved to the window and opened it, knowing that the rain would not be coming in. I like the smell of a storm.

"Random, did you learn anything of interest with regard to a possible postman?" I asked.

"Not really," he said. "I made some inquiries. No one seems to have seen anyone else in the right place at the right time."

"I see," I said. "Thank you. I may see you again later."

"All right," he said. "I'll be in my quarters all evening, then."

I nodded, turned, leaned back against the sill, watched Flora. Random closed the door quietly as he left. I listened to the rain for half a minute or so.

"What are you going to do with me?" she said, finally.

"Do?"

"You are in a position to call for a settlement on old debts. I assume that things are about to begin."

"Perhaps," I said. "Most things depend on other things. This thing is no different."

"What do you mean?"

"Give me what I want, and we'll see. I have even been known to be a nice guy on occasion."

"What is it that you want?"

"The story, Flora. Let's start with that. Of how you came to be my shepherdess there on that shadow, Earth. All pertinent details. What was the arrangement? What was the understanding? Everything. That's all."

She sighed.

"The beginning . . ." she said. "Yes . . . It was in Paris, a party, at a certain Monsieur Focault's. This was about three years before the Terror—"

"Stop," I said. "What were you doing there?"

"I had been in that general area of Shadow for approximately five of their years," she said. "I had been wandering, looking for something novel, something that suited my fancy. I came upon that place at that time in the same way we find anything. I let my desires lead me and I followed my instincts."

"A peculiar coincidence."

"Not in light of all the time involved—and considering the amount of travel in which we indulge. It was, if you like, my Avalon, my Amber surrogate, my home away from home. Call it what you will, I was there, at that party, that October night, when you came in with the little redheaded girl—Jacqueline, I believe, was her name."

That brought it back, from quite a distance, a memory I hadn't called for in a long, long while. I remembered Jacqueline far better than I did Focault's party, but

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there had been such an occasion.

"Go ahead."

"As I said," she went on, "I was there. You arrived later. You caught my attention immediately, of course. Still, if one exists for a sufficiently long period of time and travels considerably, one does occasionally encounter a person greatly resembling someone else one has known. That was my first thought after the initial excitement faded. Surely, it had to be a double. So much time had passed without a whisper. Yet, we all have secrets and good reasons for having them. This could be one of yours. So I saw that we were introduced and then had a devil of a time getting you away from that little redheaded piece for more than a few minutes. And you insisted your name was Fenneval—Cordell Fenneval. I grew uncertain. I could not tell whether it was a double or you playing games. The third possibility did cross my mind, though—that you had dwelled in some adjacent area of Shadow for a sufficient time to cast shadows of yourself. I might have departed still wondering had not Jacqueline later boasted to me concerning your strength. Now this is not the commonest subject of conversation for a woman, and the way in which she said it led me to believe that she had actually been quite impressed by some things you had done. I drew her out a bit and realized that they were all of them feats of which you were capable. That eliminated the notion of it being a double. It had to be either you or your shadow. This in mind, even if Cordell was not Corwin he was a clue, a clue that you were or had been in that shady neighborhood—the first real clue I had come across concerning your whereabouts. I had to pursue it. I began keeping track of you then, checking into your past. The more people I questioned, the more puzzling it became. In fact, after several months I was still unable to decide. There were enough smudgy areas to make it possible. Things were resolved for me the following summer though, when I revisited Amber for a time. I mentioned the peculiar affair to Eric . . ."

"Yes?"

"Well . . . He was—somewhat—aware—of the possibility."

She paused and rearranged her gloves on the seat beside her.

"Uh-huh," I said. "Just what did he tell you?"

"That it might be the real you," she said. "He told me there had been—an accident—"

"Really?"

"Well, no," she admitted. "Not an accident. He said there had been a fight and he had injured you. He thought you were going to die, and he did not want the blame. So he transported you off into Shadow and left you there, in that place. After a long while, he decided that you must be dead, that it was finally all over between you. My news naturally disturbed him. So he swore me to secrecy and sent me back to keep you under surveillance. I had a good excuse for being there, as I had already told everyone how much I liked the place."

"You didn't promise to keep

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silent for nothing, Flora. What did he give you?"

"He gave me his word that should he ever come into power here in Amber, I would not be forgotten."

"A little risky," I said. "After all, that would still leave you with something on him—knowledge of the whereabouts of a rival claimant, and of his part in putting him there."

"True. But things sort of balanced out, and I would have to admit having become an accomplice in order to talk about it."

I nodded.

"Tight, but not impossible," I agreed. "But did you think he would let me continue living if he ever did get a chance at the throne?"

"That was never discussed. Never."

"It must have crossed your mind, though."

"Yes, later," she said, "and I decided that he would probably do nothing. After all, it was beginning to seem likely that you had been deprived of your memory. There was no reason to do anything to you so long as you were harmless."

"So you stayed on to watch me, to see that I remained harmless?"

"Yes."

"What would you have done had I shown signs of recovering my memory?"

She looked at me, then looked away.

"I would have reported it to Eric."

"And what would he have done then?"

"I don't know."

I laughed a little, and she blushed. I could not remember the last time that I had seen Flora blush.

"I will not belabor the obvious," I said. "All right, you stayed on, you watched me. What next? What happened?"

"Nothing special. You just went on leading your life and I went on keeping track of it."

"All of the others knew where you were?"

"Yes, I'd made no secret of my whereabouts. In fact, all of them came around to visit me at one time or another."

"That includes Random?"

She curled her lip.

"Yes, several times," she said.

"Why the sneer?"

"It is too late to start pretending I like him," she said. "You know. I just don't like the people he associates with—assorted criminals, jazz musicians . . . I had to show him family courtesy when he was visiting my shadow, but he put a big strain on my nerves, bringing those people around at all hours—jam sessions, poker parties. The place usually reeked for weeks afterward and I was always glad to see him go. Sorry. I know you like him, but you wanted the truth."

"He offended your delicate sensibilities. Okay. I now direct your attention to the brief time when I was your guest. Random joined us rather abruptly. Pursuing him were half a dozen nasty fellows whom we dispatched in your living room."

"I recall the event quite vividly."

"Do you recall the guys responsible—the creatures we had to deal with?"

"Yes."

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"Sufficiently well to recognize one if you ever saw another?"

"I think so."

"Good. Had you ever seen one before?"

"No."

"Since?"

"No."

"Had you ever heard them described, anywhere?"

"Not that I can remember. Why?"

I shook my head.

"Not yet. This is my inquisition, remember? Now I want you to think back for a time before that evening. Back to the event that put me in Greenwood. Maybe even a little earlier. What happened, and how did you find out about it? What were the circumstances? What was your part in things?"

"Yes," she said, "I knew you would ask me that sooner or later. What happened was that Eric contacted me the day after it occurred—from Amber, via my Trump." She glanced at me again, obviously to see how I was taking it, to study my reactions. I remained expressionless. "He told me you had been in a bad accident the previous evening, and that you were hospitalized. He told me to have you transferred to a private place, one where I could have more say as to the course of your treatment."

"In other words, he wanted me to stay a vegetable."

"He wanted them to keep you sedated."

"Did he or did he not admit to being responsible for the accident?"

"He did not say that he had had someone shoot out your tire, but he did know that that was what had happened. How else could he have known? When I learned later that he was planning to take the throne, I assumed that he had finally decided it was best to remove you entirely. When the attempt failed, it seemed logical that he would do the next most effective thing: see that you were kept out of the way until after the coronation."

"I was not aware that the tire had been shot out," I said.

Her face changed. She recovered.

"You told me that you knew it was not an accident—that someone had tried to kill you. I assumed you were aware of the specifics."

I WAS treading slightly mucky ground again for the first time in a long while. I still had a bit of amnesia, and I had decided I probably always would. My memories were still spotty for a few days prior to the accident. The Pattern had restored the lost memories of my entire life up until then, but the trauma appeared to have destroyed recollection of some of the events immediately preceeding it. Not an uncommon occurrence. Organic damage rather than simple functional distress, most likely. I was happy enough to have all the rest back, so those did not seem especially lamentable. As to the accident itself, and my feelings that it had been more than an accident, I did recall the gunshots. There had been two of them. I might even have glimpsed the figure with the rifle—fleetingly, too late. Or maybe that was pure fantasy. It seemed that I had, though. I had had some-

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thing like that in mind when I had headed out for Westchester. Even at this late time, though, when I held the power in Amber, I was loathe to admit this single deficiency. I had faked my way with Flora before with a lot less to go on. I decided to stick with a winning combination.

"I was in no position to get out and see what had been hit," I said. "I heard the shots. I lost control. I had assumed that it was a tire, but I never knew for sure. The only reason I raised the question was because I was curious as to how you knew it was a tire."

"I already told you that Eric told me about it."

"It was the way that you said it that bothered me. You made it sound as if you already knew all the details before he contacted you."

She shook her head.

"Then pardon my syntax," she said. "That sometimes happens when you look at things after the fact. I am going to have to deny what you are implying. I had nothing to do with it and I had no prior knowledge that it had occurred."

"Since Eric is no longer around to confirm or deny anything, we will simply have to let it go," I said, "for now," and I said it to make her look even harder to her defense, to direct her attention away from any possible slip, either in word or expression, from which she might infer the small flaw which still existed in my memory. "Did you later become aware of the identity of the person with the gun?" I asked.

"Never," she said. "Most likely some hired thug. I don't know."

"Have you any idea how long I was unconscious before someone found me, took me to a hospital?"

She shook her head again.

Something was bothering me and I could not quite put my finger on it.

"Did Eric say what time I had been taken into the hospital?"

"No."

"When I was with you, why did you try walking back to Amber, rather than using Eric's Trump?"

"I couldn't raise him."

"You could have called someone else to bring you through," I said. "Flora, I think you are lying to me."

It was really only a test, to observe her reaction. Why not?

"About what?" she asked. "I couldn't raise anyone else. They were all otherwise occupied. Is that what you mean?"

She studied me.

I raised my arm and pointed at her and the lightning flashed at my back, just outside the window. I felt a tingle, a mild jolt. The thunderclap was also impressive.

"You sin by omission," I tried.

She covered her face with her hands and began to weep.

"I don't know what you mean!" she said. "I answered all your questions! What do you want? I don't know where you were going or who shot at you or what time it occurred! I just know the facts I've given you, damn it!"

She was either sincere or unbreakable by these means, I decided. Whichever, I was wasting my time and could get nothing more this way. Also, I had better

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switch us away from the accident before she began thinking too much about its importance to me. If there was something there that I was missing, I wanted to find it first.

"Come with me," I said.

"Where are we going?"

"I have something I want you to identify. I will tell you why after you see it."

She rose and followed me. I took her up the hall to see the body before I gave her the story on Caine. She regarded the corpse quite dispassionately. She nodded.

"Yes," she said, and, "Even if I did not know it I would be glad to say that I did, for you."

I grunted a noncommital. Family loyalty always touches me, somewhere. I could not tell whether she believed what I had said about Caine. But things sort of being equal to each other, it didn't much seem to matter. I did not tell her anything about Brand and she did not seem to possess any new information concerning him. Her only other comment when everything I'd had to say was said, was, "You wear the Jewel well. What about the headpiece?"

"It is too soon to talk of such things," I told her.

"Whatever my support may be worth . . ."

"I know," I said. "I know."

MY TOMB is a quiet place. It stands alone in a rocky declivity, shielded on three sides against the elements, surrounded by transported soil wherein a pair of scrubby trees, miscellaneous shrubs, weeds and great ropes of mountain ivy are rooted, about two miles down, back of the crest of Kolvir. It is a long, low building with two benches in front, and the ivy has contrived to cover it to a great extent, mercifully masking most of a bombastic statement graven on its face beneath my name. It is, understandably, vacant most of the time.

That evening, however, Ganelon and I repaired thither, accompanied by a good supply of wine and some loaves and cold cuts.

"You weren't joking!" he said, having dismounted, crossed over and parted the ivy, able to read by the moon's light the words that were rendered there.

"Of course not," I said, climbing down and taking charge of the horses. "It's mine all right."

Tethering our mounts to a nearby shrub, I unslung our bags of provisions and carried them to the nearest bench. Ganelon joined me as I opened the first bottle and poured us a dark, deep pair.

"I still don't understand," he said, accepting his.

"What's there to understand? I'm dead and buried there," I said. "It's my cenotaph, is what it

NOTICE

Bookshelf is alive and well. Sturgeon is enjoying a well-earned rest and will return next month.

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is—the monument that gets set up when the body has not been recovered. I only just learned about mine recently. It was raised several centuries ago, when it was decided I wasn't coming back."

"Kind of spooky," he said. "What's inside then?"

"Nothing. Though they did thoughtfully provide a niche and a casket, just in case my remains put in an appearance. You cover both bets that way."

Ganelon made himself a sandwich.

"Whose idea was it?" he asked.

"Random thinks it was Brand's or Eric's. No one remembers for sure. They all seemed to feel it was a good idea at the time."

He chuckled, an evil noise that perfectly suited his creased, scarred and red-bearded self.

"What's to become of it now?"

I shrugged.

"I suppose some of them think it's a shame to waste it this way and would like to see me fill it. In the meantime though, it's a good place to come and get drunk. I hadn't really paid my respects yet."

I put together a pair of sandwiches and ate them both. This was the first real breather I had had since my return, and perhaps the last for some time to come. It was impossible to say. But I had not really had a chance to speak with Ganelon at any length during the past week, and he was one of the few persons I trusted. I wanted to tell him everything. I had to. I had to talk with someone who was not a part of it in the same way as the rest of us. So I did.

The moon moved a considerable distance and the shards of broken glass multiplied within my crypt.

"So how did the others take it?" he asked me.

"Predictably," I answered. "I could tell that Julian did not believe a word of it even though he said that he did. He knows how I feel about him, and he is in no position to challenge me. I don't think Benedict believes me either, but he is a lot harder to read. He is biding his time, and I hope giving me the benefit of the doubt while he is about it. As for Gerard, I have the feeling that this was the final weight, and whatever trust he had left for me has just collapsed. Still, he will be returning to Amber early tomorrow, to accompany me to the Grove to recover Caine's body. No sense in turning it into a safari, but I did want another family member present. Deirdre now— She seemed happy about it. Didn't believe a word, I'm sure. But no matter. She has always been on my side, and she has never liked Caine. I'd say she is glad that I seem to be consolidating my position. I can't really tell whether Llewlla believed me or not. She doesn't much give a damn what the rest of us do to one another, so far as I can see. As to Fiona, she simply seemed amused at the whole business. But then, she has always had this detached, superior way of regarding things. You can never be certain what represents her real thinking."

"Did you tell them the business about Brand yet?"

"No. I told them about Caine and I told them I wanted them all to be in Amber by tomorrow evening. That is when the subject of

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Brand will be raised. I've an idea I want to try out."

"You contacted all of them by means of the Trumps?"

"That's right."

"There is something I have been meaning to ask you about that. Back on the shadow world we visited to obtain the weapons, there are telephones . . ."

"Yes?"

"I learned about wiretaps and such while we were there. Is it possible, do you think, that the Trumps could be bugged?"

I began to laugh, then caught myself as some of the implications of his suggestion sank in. Finally, "I don't really know," I said. "So much concerning Dworkin's work remains a mystery— The thought just never occurred to me. I've never tried it myself. I wonder, though . . .?"

"Do you know how many sets there are?"

"Well, everyone in the family has a pack and there were a dozen or so spares in the library. I don't really know whether there are any others."

"It seems to me that a lot could be learned just by listening in."

"Yes. Dad's deck, Brand's, my original pack, the one Random lost— Hell! There are quite a number unaccounted for these days. I don't know what to do about it yet. Start an inventory and try some experiments, I guess. Thanks for mentioning it."

He nodded and we both sipped for awhile in silence.

Then, "What are you going to do, Corwin?" he asked.

"About what?"

"About everything. What do we attack now, and in what order?"

"MY ORIGINAL intention was to begin tracing the black road toward its origin as soon as things were more settled here in Amber," I said. "Now though, I have shifted my priorities. I want Brand returned as soon as possible, if he is still living. If not, I want to find out what happened to him."

"But will the enemy give you the breathing time? He might be preparing a new offensive right now."

"Yes, of course. I have considered that. I feel we have some time, since they were defeated so recently. They will have to pull themselves together again, beef up their forces, reassess the situation in light of our new weapons. What I have in mind for the moment is to establish a series of lookout stations along the road to give us advance warning of any new movements on their part. Benedict has already agreed to take charge of the operation."

"I wonder how much time we have?"

I poured him another drink, as it was the only answer I could think of.

"Things were never this complicated back in Avalon—*our* Avalon, I mean."

"True," I said. "You are not the only one who misses those days. At least, they seem simpler now."

He nodded. I offered him a cigarette, but he declined in favor of his pipe. In the flamelight, he studied the Jewel of Judgment which still hung about my neck.

"You say you can really control

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the weather with that thing?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

"How do you know?"

"I've tried it. It works."

"What did you do?"

"That storm this afternoon. It was mine."

"I wonder . . .?"

"What?"

"I wonder what I would have done with that sort of power? What I'd do with it?"

"The first thing that crossed my mind," I said, slapping the wall of my tomb, "was to destroy this place by lightning—strike it repeatedly and reduce it to rubble. Leave no doubt in anyone's mind as to my feelings, my power."

"Why didn't you?"

"Got to thinking about it a bit more then. Decided—Hell! They might really have a use for the place before too long, if I'm not smart enough or tough enough or lucky enough. Such being the case, I tried to decide where I would like them to dump my bones. It caught me then that this is really a pretty good spot—up high, clean, where the elements still walk naked. Nothing in sight but rock and sky. Stars, clouds, sun, moon, wind, rain— Better company than a lot of other stiffs. Don't know why I should have to lie beside anyone I wouldn't want next to me now, and there aren't many."

"You're getting morbid, Corwin. Or drunk. Or both. Bitter, too. You don't need that."

"Who the hell are you to say what I need?"

I felt him stiffen beside me, then relax.

"I don't know," he finally said. "Just saying what I see."

"How are the troops holding up?" I asked.

"I think they are still bewildered, Corwin. They came to fight a holy war on the slopes of heaven. They think that's what the shooting was all about last week. So they are happy on that count, seeing as we won. But now this waiting, in the city— They don't understand the place. Some of the ones they thought to be enemies are now friends. They are confused. They know they are being kept ready for combat, but they have no idea against whom, or when. As they have been restricted to the billets the whole time, they have not yet realized the extent to which their presence is resented by the regulars and the population at large. They will probably be catching on fairly soon, though. I had been waiting to raise the subject, but you've been so busy lately . . ."

I sat smoking for a time.

Then, "I guess I had better have a talk with them," I said. "Won't have a chance tomorrow, though, and something should be done soon. I think they should be moved—to a bivouack area in the Forest of Arden. Tomorrow, yes. I'll locate it for you on the map when we get back. Tell them it is to keep them close to the black road. Tell them that another attack could come that way at any time—which is no less than the truth. Drill them, maintain their fighting edge. I'll come down as soon as I can and talk to them."

"That will leave you without a personal force in Amber."

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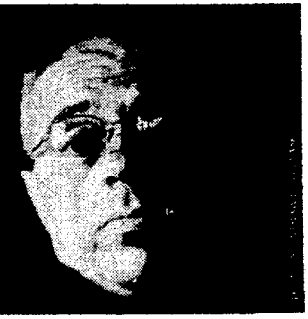

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"True. It may prove a useful risk though, both as a demonstration of confidence and a gesture of consideration. Yes, I think it will turn out to be a good move. If not . . ." I shrugged.

I poured and tossed another empty into my tomb.

"By the way," I said, "I'm sorry."

"What for?"

"I just noticed that I am morbid and drunk and bitter. I don't need that."

He chuckled and clicked his glass against my own.

"I know," he said. "I know."

So we sat there while the moon fell, till the last bottle was interred among its fellows. We talked for a time of days gone by. At length, we fell silent, and my eyes drifted to the stars above Amber. It was good that we had come to this place, but now the city was calling me back. Knowing my thoughts, Ganelon rose and stretched, headed for the horses. I relieved myself beside my tomb and followed him.

V

THE Grove of the Unicorn lies in Arden to the southwest of Kolvir, near to that jutting place where the land begins its final descent into the valley called Garnath. While Garnath had been cursed, burned, invaded and fought through in recent years, the adjacent highlands stood unmolested. The grove where Dad claimed to have seen the unicorn ages before and to have experienced the peculiar events which led to his adopting the beast as the patron of Amber and placing it on his coat of arms was, as near as we could tell, a spot now but slightly screened from the long view across Garnath to the sea—twenty or thirty paces in from the upper edge of things: an asymmetric glade where a small spring trickled from a mass of rock, formed a clear pool, brimmed into a tiny creek, made its way off toward Garnath and on down.

It was to this place that Gerard and I rode the following day, leaving at an hour that found us halfway down our trail from Kolvir before the sun skipped flakes of light across the ocean, then cast its whole bucketful against the sky. Gerard drew rein as it was doing this. He dismounted then and motioned to me to do the same. I did, leaving Star and the pack horse I was leading there beside his own huge piebald. I followed him off perhaps a dozen paces into a basin half-filled with gravel. He halted and I came up beside him.

"What is it?" I asked.

He turned and faced me and his eyes were narrow and his jaw clamped tight. He unfastened his cloak, folded it and placed it on the ground. He unclasped his sword-belt and lay it atop the cloak.

"GET RID of your blade and your cloak," he said. "They will only get in the way."

I had an inkling of what was coming, and I decided I had better go along with it. I folded my cloak, placed the Jewel of Judgment beside Grayswandir and faced him once again. I said only one word.

"Why?"

"It has been a long time," he

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said, "and you might have forgotten."

He came at me slowly, and I got my arms out in front of me and backed away. He did not swing at me. I used to be faster than he was. We were both crouched, and he was making slow pawing movements with his left hand, his right hand nearer to his body, twitching slightly.

If I had had to choose a place to fight with Gerard, this would not have been it. He, of course, was aware of this. If I had to fight with Gerard at all, I would not have chosen to do so with my hands. I am better than Gerard with a blade or a quarterstaff. Anything that involved speed and strategy and gave me a chance to hit him occasionally while keeping him at bay would permit me to wear him down eventually and provide openings for heavier and heavier assaults. He, of course, was aware of this also. That is why he had trapped me as he had. I understood Gerard though, and I had to play by his rules now.

I brushed his hand away a couple times as he stepped up his movements, pressing nearer to me with every pace. Finally, I took a chance, ducked and swung. I landed a fast, hard left just a little above his middle. It would have broken a stout board or ruptured the insides of a lesser mortal. Unfortunately, time had not softened Gerard. I heard him grunt, but he blocked my right, got his right hand under my left arm and caught my shoulder from behind.

I closed with him fast then, anticipating a shoulder lock I might not be able to break; and, turning, driving forward, catching his left shoulder in a similar fashion, I hooked my right leg behind his knee and was able to cast him backward to the ground.

He maintained his grip though, and I came down atop him. I released my own hold and was able to drive my right elbow into his left side as we hit. The angle was not ideal and his left hand went up and across, reaching to grasp his right somewhere behind my head.

I was able to duck out of it, but he still had my arm. For a moment, I had a clear shot at his groin with my right, but I restrained myself. It is not that I have any qualms about hitting a man below the belt. I knew that if I did it to Gerard just then his reflexes would probably cause him to break my shoulder. Instead, scraping my forearm on the gravel, I managed to twist my left arm up behind his head, while at the same time sliding my right arm between his legs and catching him about the left thigh. I rolled back as I did this, attempting to straighten my legs as soon as my feet were beneath me. I wanted to raise him off the ground and slam him down again, driving my shoulder into his middle for good measure.

But Gerard scissored his legs and rolled to the left, forcing me to somersault across his body. I let go my hold on his head and pulled my left arm free as I went over. I scrambled clockwise then, dragging my right arm away and going for a toehold.

But Gerard would have none of that. He had gotten his arms beneath him by then. With one great

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heave, he tore himself free and twisted his way back to his feet. I straightened myself and leaped backward. He began moving toward me immediately, and I decided that he was going to maul the hell out of me if I just kept grappling with him. I had to take a few chances.

I watched his feet, and at what I judged to be the best moment I dove in beneath his extended arms just as he was shifting his weight forward onto his left foot and raising his right. I was able to catch hold of his right ankle and hoist it about four feet high behind him; He went over and down, forward and to his left.

He scrambled to get to his feet and I caught him on the jaw with a left hook that knocked him down again. He shook his head and blocked with his arms as he came up once more. I tried to kick him in the stomach, but missed as he pivoted, catching him on the hip. He maintained his balance and advanced again.

I threw jabs at his face and circled. I caught him twice more in the stomach and danced away. He smiled. He knew I was afraid to close with him. I snapped a kick at his stomach and connected. His arms dropped sufficiently for me to chop him alongside the neck, just above the collarbone. At that moment, however, his arms shot forward and locked about my waist. I slammed his jaw with the heel of my hand, but it did not stop him from tightening his grip and raising me above the ground. Too late to hit him again. Those massive arms were already crushing my kidneys. I sought his carotids with my thumbs, squeezed.

But he kept raising me, back, up over his head. My grip loosened, slipped away. Then he slammed me down on my back in the gravel, as peasant women do their laundry on rocks.

There were exploding points of light and the world was a jittering, half-real place as he dragged me to my feet again. I saw his fist—

THE sunrise was lovely, but the angle was wrong . . . By about ninety degrees . . .

Suddenly, I was assailed by vertigo. It cancelled out the beginning awareness of a roadmap of pains that ran along my back and reached the big city somewhere in the vicinity of my chin.

I was hanging high in the air. By turning my head slightly, I could see for a very great distance, down.

I felt a set of powerful clamps affixed to my body—shoulder and thigh. When I turned to look at them, I saw that they were hands. Twisting my neck even farther, I saw that they were Gerard's hands. He was holding me at full arms' length above his head. He stood at the very edge of the trail, and I could see Garnath and the terminus of the black road far below. If he let go, part of me might join the bird droppings that smeared the cliff face and the rest would come to resemble washed up jelly fish I had known on beaches past.

"Yes. Look down, Corwin," he said, feeling me stir, glancing up, meeting my eyes. "All that I need to do is open my hands."

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"I hear you," I said softly, trying to figure a way to drag him along with me if he decided to do it.

"I am not a clever man," he said. "But I had a thought—a terrible thought. This is the only way that I know to do something about it. My thought was that you had been away from Amber for an awfully long while. I have no way of knowing whether the story about your losing your memory is entirely true. You have come back and you have taken charge of things, but you do not yet truly rule here. I was troubled by the deaths of Benedict's servants, as I am troubled now by the death of Caine. But Eric has died recently also, and Benedict is maimed. It is not so easy to blame you for this part of things, but it has occurred to me that it might be possible—if it should be that you are secretly allied with our enemies of the black road."

"I am not," I said.

"It does not matter, for what I have to say," he said. "Just hear me out. Things will go the way that they will go. —If, during your long absence, you arranged this state of affairs—possibly even removing Dad and Brand as part of your design—then I see you as out to destroy all family resistance to your usurpation."

"Would I have delivered myself to Eric to be blinded and imprisoned if this were the case?"

"Hear me out!" he repeated. "You could easily have made mistakes that led to that. It does not matter now. You may be as innocent as you say or as guilty as possible. Look down, Corwin. That is all. Look down at the black road. Death is the limit of the distance you travel if that is your doing. I have shown you my strength once again, lest you have forgotten. I can kill you, Corwin. Do not even be certain that your blade will protect you, if I can get my hands on you but once. And I will, to keep my promise. My promise is only that if you are guilty, I will kill you the moment I learn of it. Know also that my life is insured, Corwin, for it is linked now to your own."

"What do you mean?"

"All of the others are with us at this moment, via my Trump, watching, listening. You cannot arrange my removal now without revealing your intentions to the entire family. That way, if I die forsworn, my promise can still be kept."

"I get the point," I said. "And if someone else kills you? They remove me, also. That leaves Julian, Benedict, Random and the girls to man the barricades. Better and better—for whoever it is. Whose idea was this, really?"

"Mine! Mine alone!" he said, and I felt his grip tighten, his arms bend and grow tense. "You are just trying to confuse things! Like you always do!" he groaned. "Things didn't go bad till you came back! Damn it, Corwin! I think it's your fault!"

Then he hurled me into the air.

"Not guilty, Gerard!" was all I had time to shout.

Then he caught me—a great shoulder-wrenching grab—and snatched me back from the precipice. He swung me in and around and set me on my feet. He walked off immediately, heading back to

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the gravelly area where we had fought. I followed him, and we collected our things.

As he was clasping his big belt he looked up at me and looked away again.

"We'll not talk about it any more," he said.

"All right."

I turned and walked back to the horses. We mounted and continued on down the trail.

THE spring made its small music in the grove. Higher now, the sun strung lines of light through the trees. There was still some dew on the ground. The sod that I had cut for Caine's grave was moist with it.

I fetched the spade that I had packed and opened the grave. Without a word, Gerard helped me move the body onto a piece of sailcloth we had brought for that purpose. We folded it about him and closed it with big, loose stitches.

"Corwin! Look!" It was a whisper, and Gerard's hand closed on my elbow as he spoke.

I followed the direction of his gaze and froze. Neither of us moved as we regarded the apparition: a soft, shimmering white encompassed it, as if it were covered with down, rather than fur and maning; its tiny, cloven hooves were golden, as was the delicate, whorled horn that rose from its narrow head. It stood atop one of the lesser rocks, nibbling at the lichen that grew there. Its eyes, when it raised them and looked in our direction, were a bright, emerald green. It joined us in immobility, for a pair of instants. Then it made a quick, nervous gesture with its front feet, pawing the air and striking the stone, three times. And then it blurred and vanished like a snowflake, silently, perhaps in the woods to our right.

I rose and crossed to the stone. Gerard followed me. There, in the moss, I traced its tiny hoofmarks.

". . . Then we really did see it," Gerard said.

I nodded.

"We saw something. Did you ever see it before?"

"No. Did you?"

I shook my head.

"Julian claims he once saw it," he said, "in the distance. Says his hounds refused to give chase."

"It was beautiful— That long, silky tail, those shiny hooves . . ."

"Yes. Dad always took it as a good omen."

"I'd like to myself."

"Strange time for it to appear . . . All these years . . ."

I nodded again.

"Is there a special observance? It being our patron and all . . . Is there something we should do?"

"If there is, Dad never told me about it," I said. I patted the rock on which it had appeared. "If you herald some turn in our fortunes, if you bring us some measure of grace—thanks, unicorn," I said. "And even if you do not, thanks for the brightness of your company at a dark time."

We went and drank from the spring then. We secured our grim parcel on the back of the third horse. We led our mounts until we were away from the place, where, save for the water, things had become very still.

TO BE CONTINUED

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POW WOW

"HOW LONG," asked Chief Edward Longlegs, Sr., staring into the mirror and centering the war bonnet on his head with both hands, "am I supposed to sit around here saying 'ugg' and 'how' like some kind of savage?"

He adjusted the feathered train to fall exactly between his shoulder-blades, then glanced at his grandson's reflection in the mirror.

"As long as it takes," answered Ambassador-at-large Ed Longlegs, III, scrutinizing his grandfather's costume and frowning. "There's still something wrong."

Chief Longlegs looked at himself. Boots. Fringed leather pants and jerkin with authentic Hopi beadwork. Authentic Sioux war bonnet. He looked up at his grandson.

"Looks O.K. to me."

The Ambassador shook his head, unconvinced. "I can't quite put my finger on it. Somehow, you don't look indian enough."

Chief Longlegs grunted. "Been an injin all my life."

"But you don't look it."

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Chief Longlegs peered into the mirror. His weathered face and hooked nose went well with the bonnet. "Best lookin' injin I ever seen."

"It's not your face."

"What is it?"

The Ambassador brightened, pointing. "Your boots."

Chief Longlegs lifted one foot, examining the boot. "What's the matter with my boots?"

"They aren't authentic."

"They're gen-u-wine Mexican leather."

"I can see that."

"Hand tooled."

"I can see that, too. But whoever heard of an indian wearing cowboy boots?"

"Me. I worn'em all my life. On the reservation, *every*body wears 'em."

The Ambassador showed his exasperation. "Grandfather, we aren't *on* the reservation. We have to impress a few palefaces."

"Ain't no difference between palefaces and most injins no more. Take you, for example. You ain't no more an injin than . . . than . . ." Chief Longlegs waved his hand in a great arc in front of him, indicating the ship around them and the Moon ahead. ". . . them critters out there."

"Aliens," corrected Ambassador Longlegs.

"Whatever you call 'em, they ain't injins and neither are you." Chief Longlegs jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "I seen you back there in Washington powwowin' with the big wigs. Do you call him Great White Father ever now and then so's he remembers you're an injin?"

"I call him Mr. President like everyone else."

A laugh erupted from Chief Longlegs, a curt, sarcastic laugh. He pointed an accusatory index finger at his grandson. "You *see*! You ain't no injin! Any self-respectin' injin would throw in a few Great-White-Fathers just to keep'em guessin'." Chief Longlegs snorted and chuckled, enjoying his grandson's discomfort. Eventually, he subsided. "Where was we anyways?"

"Your costume. Are you sure everything else is authentic?"

"More or less."

The Ambassador frowned. "What do you mean, more or less?"

"You called me at the last minute, you know."

"I know. So what?"

"So I had to scrounge around." He touched the bonnet. "This here's Sioux, but it's authentic Sioux, they tell me, and this . . ." He touched the leather jerkin. ". . . is Hope-eye, or most of it anyways. Some of them beads is plastic and put on by machine, but them designs is supposed to be Hope-eye, and—"

"Is *any*thing Apache?"

"What do you care? You wouldn't know an Apache from a Sioux if one bit you."

The Ambassador shook his head, incredulous. "None of it is Apache?"

"Not much. If you'da given me more time—"

"We didn't *have* more time. Now take off those cowboy boots and put on some moccasins."

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"Ain't got no moccasins."

"Then go barefoot."

"Barefoot!"

"It has to look authentic and cowboy boots," said Ambassador Longlegs, "don't."

"But barefoot does."

"It's better than nothing."

Grumbling, Chief Longlegs reached down and began tugging at his left boot. It came off easily. The right one stuck.

"Gimme a hand here, half-breed," said Chief Longlegs, extending his right leg.

"Grandfather, please stop calling me half-breed."

"That's what you are, ain't it? Half white man, half injin."

"I'm a full-blooded Apache just like you."

Chief Longlegs grunted.

"What's that grunt supposed to mean?"

"No full-blooded Apache would of treated no injins the way you treated them injins."

"What injins—I mean, indians?"

"In New York. They just wanted their rightful tribal land back, but you—you Uncle Tom-Tom—you skinned 'em out of it for the Great White Father."

"*Grand*father, they wanted Manhatten back."

"Don't matter."

"Sometimes you're very difficult to talk to, grandfather."

Chief Longlegs grunted.

"And what's *that* supposed to mean?"

"It means my leg's gettin' tired sticking out here in the air. Take off the boot."

The Ambassador grabbed the heel and toe of the boot and jerked.

"*Watch* it! You're gonna rip off the leg."

"Sorry."

WHILE watching his grandson struggle with the boot, Chief Longlegs began to doubt the wisdom of accepting the boy's offer. If he were incapable of removing a simple boot (the leg was twisted and jerked; sweat blossomed on his grandson's forehead), how would he be at saving the human race, palefaces included?

Initially, when his grandson phoned from Washington, Chief Longlegs had been reluctant to accept the call. For months after the Manhatten incident, Chief Longlegs had gone around denying kinship to the boy. When asked if he were related to the Ed Longlegs who sold out the indians holding Bedlow Island, he usually tried to suggest the Ed Longlegs involved was a Seminole. No relation. Accepting the phonecall might acknowledge the kinship. Still, the boy *was* kin. Acknowledging it, Chief Longlegs was forced to acknowledge something else about his grandson. In spite of the boy's Harvard education—perhaps because of it—he was a dumb injin. In Chief Longlegs' opinion, nothing was worse than a dumb injin, except a dumb paleface. He had taken the call.

When the boy explained the situation, that alien lifeforms had occupied the Moon, completely rending Tranquility Base and destroying any approaching ships or missiles from Earth, that the President wanted Ed Longlegs, the

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successful negotiator in the Bedlow Island incident, to talk to them and strike a bargain, that Ed Longlegs wanted Chief Longlegs to accompany him—when all this was explained, Chief Longlegs called the boy a dumb injin to his face and hung up.

The boy called back. He pleaded, saying this was the finest opportunity in modern times to demonstrate indian wisdom. Chief Longlegs replied that wise red men stayed on the reservation when green men threatened White men. The boy said the world was in danger. Chief Longlegs said indians always lived with danger. The boy said the family name would be enhanced. You mean, responded Chief Longlegs, the career of Ed Longlegs would be enhanced. Yes, admitted his grandson, the grueling climb to the presidency would be shortened.

Why, inquired Chief Longlegs, *me?*

Because, answered the boy, *the government is desperate.*

THE governments of the United States and the Soviet Union had tried everything to contact the aliens. When radio communication proved fruitless, they sent out ambassadors. Each time an ambassador's ship settled into parking orbit around the Moon, the aliens blasted it. Ed Longlegs, seeing an opportunity to save mankind and, incidently, enhance his career, had sold the President on the idea of Chief Edward Longlegs, Sr., possessor of ancient indian lore, gleener of sacred mystical insights, a man in complete harmony with himself and nature, a man so serene rattlesnakes only bit him when forced to at gunpoint—in short, a man capable of communicating with anything, terrestrial or extraterrestrial.

Chief Longlegs, mulling over the description, had hesitated, remembering his last encounter with a rattler. The snake had plunged its fangs into Chief Longlegs' calf, and if it had shown any emotion at all, it certainly was not a sense of coercion—more like delight.

Finally, Chief Longlegs spoke. *Me?*

Yes, you.

But—

All of it, assured Ed Longlegs, was simply a deception, a harmless ruse to let the boy get into a position to talk to the aliens and save the world. Did Chief Longlegs, after all, disapprove of deceiving palefaces?

Of course not, replied Chief Longlegs, but he did disapprove of situations tending to endanger Chief Longlegs' life.

The boy assured him he could rest easily. At Harvard, they had taught Ed Longlegs, III, to handle any situation.

In spite of himself, Chief Longlegs found the mystical insights taught at Harvard persuasive. Plus, he liked the idea of deceiving palefaces, whether pale white or pale green. Besides, he would get a free trip to Washington and a ride in a rocketship, if that was what they called them. It would divert him from the daily grind of haggling with the Japanese import company that supplied the pot shards he sold the archaeologists. He accepted.

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WATCHING the boy yank at his boot, feeling the pain it caused in his hip, Chief Longlegs rather doubted the wisdom of accepting.

"Here," said Chief Longlegs, withdrawing his boot from his grandson's hands and hiking it on his knee, "let me do it."

He pulled on the heel, pointed his toe and extracted his foot.

Ambassador Longlegs wiped his forehead with his sleeve. "O.K. Let's go."

"Where?"

"The bridge. We're almost there."

Chief Longlegs followed his grandson into the corridor. They took the elevator, riding in silence. During most of the trip from Earth, Chief Longlegs had ridden in silence. He felt like a prisoner, forbidden to leave his cabin. The boy had said it would strengthen his image—add authority—if he were held off stage until the crucial moment, then brought in like a savior.

Chief Longlegs gave less than a hoot in hell about his image. He wanted to see the spaceship. He had an idea for painting pot shards so the archaeologists would think the Apaches were descended from space travelers. It would boost sales. But he needed authentic designs. To get them, he had to see the ship. Even when he explained the situation to the boy, simply and clearly, his grandson kept him in the cabin. Harvard had done something to the boy's values.

The door opened onto the bridge. In front of them, a figure, its back turned, stood in the center of a wide panorama of glass windows, staring out at the Moon below. The figure heard the hiss of the opening door and glanced around, simultaneously telling one of the numerous men seated at the bridge console to keep an eye on the planet.

"He think it's goin' somewheres?" whispered Chief Longlegs and chuckled.

"Shh," said his grandson. "Remember, only Apache."

"Ahh," said Captain Carapalida, approaching them with a hand outstretched toward Chief Longlegs, "Ambassador and Chief Longlegs." He grasped Chief Longlegs' hand in both of his, shaking it vigorously and peering deeply—almost reverently—into his eyes. "I was about to call you two. We're almost ready to take a parking orbit around the Moon." The Captain grinned.

"What's he grinning at?" asked Chief Longlegs in Apache.

"The responsibility shifts to us as soon as we're in orbit."

The Captain, eyebrows raised, glanced at Ambassador Longlegs. "What's he say, Ambassador?"

"He wants to know if the escort ships are still with us."

Captain Carapalida returned his attention to Chief Longlegs, nodding his head in an exaggerated arc and speaking in a raised voice. "YES, SIR. THEY ARE, SIR."

"Tell him I'm not deaf."

"He's not deaf."

"Oh," said the Captain, flustered. "Sorry. If you'll come over here, you can see our escort."

Chief Longlegs followed the two men to the center of the wall of

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glass. In front of them, the Moon—from their angle, half full—hung in space like a lunar globe. Even what was left of Tranquility Base, which showed on lunar globes as a dot, showed on the Moon as a dot. To either side, ships identical to their own, bubble-nosed giants dragging three long tubes and sporting complicated arrays of solar panels, paced them, approaching the Moon. Only their ship carried the spidery LEM.

"When do they usually blast ambassadors?" asked Chief Longlegs.

His grandson glowered.

"What's he say?" asked the Captain.

"He wants to know when we enter the danger zone."

"We're in it."

Hesitantly, the Ambassador responded. "I see. I think I'd better consult with my grandfather." He continued in Apache. *"What do we do now?"*

"How the unhappy-hunting-grounds am I supposed to know?" Hell was a difficult word to translate into Apache.

"You're the wise-man, aren't you?"

"You're the Harvard man, aren't you?"

"Grandfather, this is a serious matter. Try to think of some new approach. Mankind needs time." He pointed out the viewports at the Moon. *"Those creatures have the technological capability of coming here from the stars, then destroying our great birds like they were tiny flys."*

"What do you mean by great birds?"

"Spacecraft," said the Ambassador in English.

"Oh. I always use heavenly canoe myself."

"Whatever you call it, they *can destroy it. We have to buy time until we've reached equality with them."*

"First things first. We don't even know if they're still out there. They may have gone home. You might try talking to them."

"Good idea. Captain, is it possible to contact these creatures?"

"Sure." The Captain turned to a technician and ordered a visual and audio channel to the surface. When it was established, he turned back to the Ambassador. "That's the frequency the Ruskies used. They got thirty seconds of good talk in before the creatures blasted them."

Chief Longlegs noticed his grandson swallow.

"O.K. We'll try it. Where do I stand?"

"Anywhere. The monitor camera will pick it up and feed it into the communications link."

Ambassador Longlegs threw out his chest and stepped forward, staring at the Moon and raising his right hand, palm out.

"We come in peace," he said, "for all mankind."

Two beams of blue light shot up from the surface. The escort ships flamed—incandescent blue balls—and vanished.

"I guess," said Chief Longlegs, watching the dying sparks from one of the explosions, *"that was a bad idea."*

Ambassador Longlegs, much too stunned to speak, nodded agreement.

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"Let me try," said Chief Longlegs.

Shaken from his stupor, the Ambassador looked at Chief Longlegs. *"You?"*

"What do we have to lose?"

"Our lives?"

"Chicken-livered, eh?" said Chief Longlegs, rather proud of the translation.

"Prudent."

"Look, I can't do any worse than you did."

"How do you figure?"

"You lost two heavenly canoes, right?"

His grandson nodded.

"I can only lose one."

"Grandfather, in case you hadn't noticed, we're *on* that one."

"I noticed," said Chief Longlegs, stepping forward. *"Out of my way."*

Chief Longlegs raised his right hand to the Moon. *"How."*

He squinted, examining the planet's surface for an answering burst of blue light. None came. Encouraged, he continued.

"This is Chief Edward Longlegs talking. What are you foreigners doing on our hunting grounds?"

"Grandfather, we're not even sure they know English or Russian. I'm sure they don't know Apache."

"Are they shooting?"

Ambassador Longlegs fell silent.

"Listen here, palefaces," continued Chief Longlegs. *"You go hunt the heavenly buffalo on somebody else's ground. You got that?"*

SUDDENLY, a meter in front of Chief Longlegs, the air shimmered, resolving itself into a creature, a humanoid bi-ped, feathered from crest to claws. It reminded Chief Longlegs of a cross between a Hopi Kiva dancer and a parrot. The beak protruded like a macaw's. Apparition, wondered Chief Longlegs? Holographic projection? Perhaps the creature itself, teleported to the bridge of the ship? Hard to tell.

Seeing it, the crew panicked, fleeing. They packed themselves so solidly into the bridge elevator that the last man, a sweating fat man, had to scale the front rank and be held aloft by the other passengers. The elevator door closed, leaving only the Captain and the two Longlegs.

The creature's beak, flanked by two squinting eyes, clacked like wooden blocks when it spoke.

"We will meet with the feathered one," it said, its Apache, except for the clacks, accentless, glancing at some object hidden among the feathers on its wrist, *"at twenty-three hundred Greenwich Mean Time."*

The apparition vanished.

AFTER the ship's doctor gave Ambassador Longlegs a mild sedative, Chief Longlegs and his grandson returned to their cabin to prepare for the descent to the surface. Chief Longlegs, noticing his grandson's chagrin at being surpassed in his area of expertise—diplomacy—decided to gloat.

"You see," said Chief Longlegs, changing out of his beaded suit and into the white NASA jumpsuit provided by the Captain, "you just gotta know how to talk to them critters."

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"Grandfather," said Ambassador Longlegs, zipping up his own jumpsuit, "stop gloating."

"I ain't gloatin'. I'm just tellin' you how it is. If they'd have taught you a little more mystical injin wisdom at Harvard, you'd know that."

"You don't know any more about mystical indian wisdom than I do."

"I know them critters ain't shootin'."

They finished dressing in silence. Chief Longlegs, tired of walking barefoot on the cold metal decks, fearful of arthritis, slipped on his cowboy boots, then replaced his war bonnet, positioning it securely.

"How do I look?"

"Ridiculous. That war bonnet and those boots don't go with the jumpsuit."

"Tough."

"You're going to wear them anyway."

"Yep."

"Why?"

"So's they'll know me from you. We probably all look alike to them critters."

"When we get down there, let *me* do the talking."

"They want to talk to me, remember, the feathered one."

"Do you know *any*thing about ambassadorial work?"

"They ain't shootin'. That's all I gotta know."

The cabin phone hummed. Ambassador Longlegs touched it on. A technician's face appeared.

"Lasercom from the White House."

"Put it on."

The President's face, gray-haired and distinguished but clearly burdened, came on the screen.

"Ed," said the President, nodding.

"Mr. President."

"This is a serious situation."

"I agree, sir."

The President's gaze went past Ambassador Longlegs to the bunk behind. "Is that your grandfather?"

"Yes, sir."

"An impressive figure. Does he speak English?"

"Only Apache. As I told you at our conference, sir, he is untainted by modern civilization."

"I see," said the President. He then raised an open hand to Chief Longlegs. "How."

Chief Longlegs responded from the bunk. "Ugg."

The President's attention returned to the Ambassador. "The Captain has told me of your initial contact with the creatures. At first, I was dubious of your suggestion. Your grandfather, sagacious as he no doubt is, seemed the wrong diplomatic tool for the job. However, it seems to be proving out. We must continue the strategy. When you get on the surface, I want you to let your grandfather do the talking. They seem to be willing to listen to him. I have obtained full authority from every country in the United Nations to let him make any agreement he feels is justified. We need time, Ed, to gain technological parity with these creatures. Your grandfather has to get us that time. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good luck."

The screen went blank.

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They left the cabin and proceeded to an airlock, transferring to the landing vehicle. The plan called for a geodesic air dome to be erected on the surface and filled with an Earth-normal atmosphere. The creatures could use their apparition to enter the dome.

STRAPPED into his seat, war bonnet on his lap, Chief Longlegs began to plan his negotiation strategy. The LEM dropped away from the underside of the larger ship and began falling toward the Moon. The LEM pilot, talking in numbers, relayed data to the ship. Below them, the cratered surface grew. Chief Longlegs, hard at work on his plan, ignored it. When his grandson asked about the plan, Chief Longlegs answered, "I figger I'll treat this critter just like an injin agent."

They neared the surface and shot over the crater-pocked terrain. Eventually, the alien craft, a rickety-looking structure like an oil derrick surmounted by a sphere, came into view. The pilot landed, settling the LEM two hundred meters from the derrick, then pushed the geodesic dome-shaped button on the control panel.

A noise erupted from the side of the LEM. Startled, Chief Longlegs peered out the port. A ramp was just touching ground below him. A cart rolled down the ramp onto the surface of the Moon. It stopped after a hundred meters and seemed to explode metal bars. Arms quickly extruded from the cart, catching the bars and rapidly beginning to build the dome frame. Once complete, the cart sprayed the frame with plastic from a hose with a blunderbuss nozzle, connected the dome to the LEM with a plastic tunnel and retreated ten meters, stopping. A green light came on in the LEM.

"Ready," said the pilot.

"Let's go, grandfather."

"What do you mean, let's *go?"* Chief Longlegs indicated himself with his thumb. *"The bird wanted to talk to me."*

"Yes, but—"

"And, *the white-chief-in-Washington did say I was supposed to do the talking."*

"I know, but—"

"No buts. I'm going alone."

Before his grandson could object, Chief Longlegs, grabbing a voice activated document printer, found the entrance to the plastic tunnel and started for the dome. Though he realized the act might look like courage to the pilot, his actual motive in bolting the LEM was to jettison his grandson. Mystical Harvard wisdom or no mystical Harvard wisdom, the boy lacked sense. He would only antagonize the bird into blasting them.

Chief Longlegs emerged inside the dome and put on his war bonnet. Almost immediately, the feathery apparition shimmered and solidified. It raised one clawed hand.

"How," it clacked.

Chief Longlegs, glad to see the creature had learned English at last—Apache lacked words for some of the things they would be forced to talk about—responded with a raised hand. "O.K. How

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you?"

"Fine. What do you want with us?"

"What do *you*," said Chief Longlegs, "want with us?"

"We intend," clacked the feathered emissary with a candor Chief Longlegs could but admire, "to take all of the usable worlds in this arm of the galaxy."

"That sounds reasonable. Can I ask why?"

"It is our destiny, our manifest destiny."

Somewhere, Chief Longlegs had heard the phrase before. He shrugged, unable to pinpoint the source. Sizing up his adversary, Chief Longlegs decided they were critters who both spoke the same blunt language.

"What say we skip all the Harvard niceties and get down to business. I gotta proposition."

"What kind of proposition?" asked the creature, the eyes, next to the beak, narrowing.

They got down to business. Chief Longlegs offered, the bird rejected. The bird offered, Chief Longlegs rejected. After several hours of tedious detail work, Chief Longlegs had to admit the bird was a hard bargainer, harder than the Japanese pot shard company, harder than the indian agent, harder even than the archaeologists. Still, the bird reacted enough like them to let a bargain—rough but adequate—be struck.

They drew up a voice-printed document and signed, the bird's talon mark next to Chief Longlegs' X.

Chief Longlegs rolled his copy of the treaty into a tube, picked up the voice-printer, and started for the tunnel. He hesitated at the entrance, a question forming in his mind.

He glanced back. "By the way, how come you critters agreed to talk to me and blasted everybody else?"

"We saw your feathers and took you for human."

Chief Longlegs, his curiosity satisfied, made his way back to the LEM. It lifted off, hopping up toward the orbiting spacecraft. During the trip, Ambassador Longlegs read the treaty, his scowl deepening with each paragraph.

"Grandfather," he said as they approached the mothership, "this is the *worst* treaty I have ever *seen*. You gave away *every*thing."

"Yep."

Angry, Ambassador Longlegs shook the document, jabbing at a middle paragraph with his free hand. "*Look* at this, grandfather. Mankind is restricted to Sol's four inner planets for a *hundred years!*"

"Yep."

"I can't show a treaty like this to the President," protested Ambassador Longlegs. "It's man's *destiny* to own the stars. We can't just . . . just . . ." He threw up his hands. ". . .*stop!* You've made the inner planets into some kind of . . ." His hands continued to wave. ". . . ". . . *reservation!*"

"Yep."

"Is that all you have to say, *yep?* What am *I* supposed to tell the President?"

"Tell him I got faith in him. When the time comes, the Great White Father will know how to break a treaty." ★

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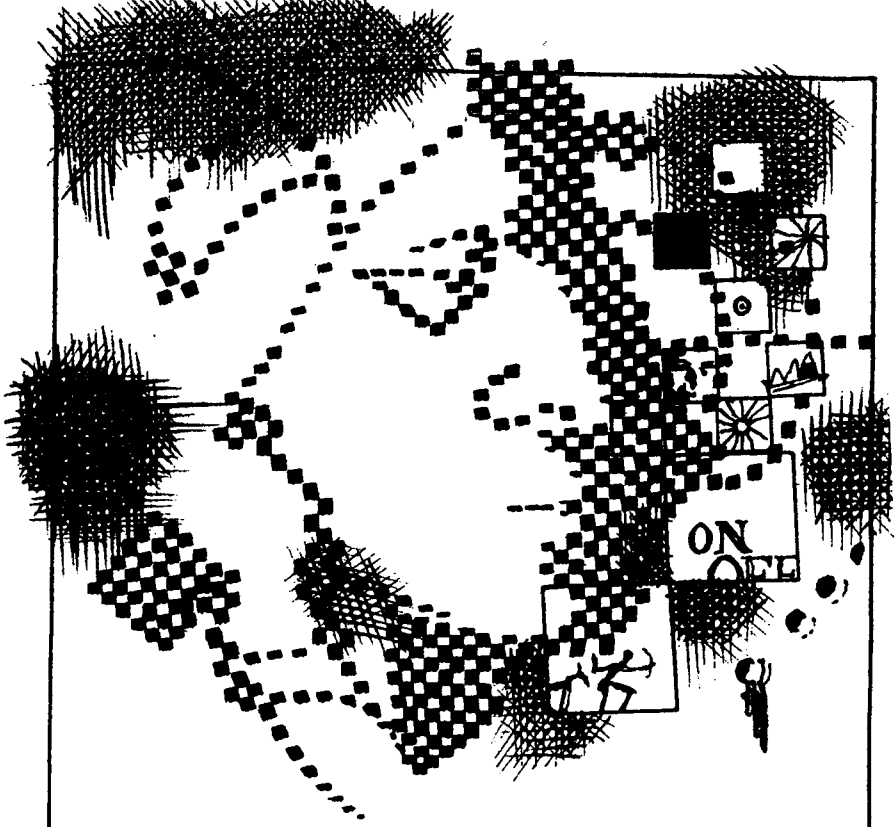

We know the past and must act accordingly—
so that the Present may be Eternal!

A HORSE OF A DIFFERENT TECHNICOLOR

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CRAIG STRETE

I CAN remember when the years changed, I can remember when I rode a horse of a different technicolor. Now when I feel like having a woman, I have myself changed into one. You remember me. I was Mr. and Mrs., I rode across your screen. I danced for you. I fell off horses for you. I got shot for you. I was living in two worlds and Jesus Christ was working the night shift. When they said do a rain dance, I did a rain dance. When the dance called for a woman, I was one. You remember me, don't you? If you do, tell me who I am. Am I the book? The movie? I can remember when I rode a horse of a different technicolor. I'm making sense to you, yes I am, unless I am a movie and you are a book.

The universe is divided into two worlds. Now the appeal of two worlds is the fear of death. One world is the book and there it is written, "All lives are to be divided into two sections, day and night." The other world is the microphone and the camera and there it is recorded for playback, shining to us, "I am the kingdom and the glory. Let the children come unto me for they shall be recreated in my own image."

It all began in 2074. Twice. Once for day and once for night. This story began in 2074 where precedence became the word as it was spoken. THE WORD. Man learned that all men had to rechannel their aggressions. They invented spectators. They said people should be great and disinterested souls. We know the past. We must act accordingly. Yes, let us act accordingly.

THE year 2074 was the year of the success, the all-inclusion, the triumph of the wait-and-watch. They learned how to make people act accordingly. (Do you remember when you wondered whether the people you watched on television could watch you. Now you know, don't you?) And 2074 happened twice. Once in the soil and once in the spirit and they all began acting accordingly. Next year will be the third year 2074 happened. 2074 will always be with us. That is what they said. Did you listen?

I listened and did not learn. I couldn't be the language, couldn't hide in the same time, couldn't stand for the old or whisper soft things counting me to sleep like tallied sheep. They pushed my button. I know they pushed my button. I heard the connections made in my brain. I died in my sleep and was changed into someone else on a silver screen. I used to be a book. I'm a lie. I know I'm a lie but I am very important.

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That makes all the difference. You can be punished for not listening.

(COCKTAIL CONVERSATION TAPE, HOME OF IRON EYES CODY, HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA, 2074—Please file under "possible blackmail material")

Did we push your brain button? Did you die in your sleep? Will you ever know if we made you into someone else? If we changed you from a movie to a book? Did your whole life flash before your eyes at the last moment? Remember—we saved you from 2075.

And only white men flash through their lives at the last moment, only white men want to watch home movies. Remember—we saved you from 2075. Trust us. Be true to yourself, ethnic one, lest you be undone, as it were, in playback.

The signal fades with every playback. Save your strength. Magnetism loves you, be kind to its home, the tape. Remember, you have your place with your race, and are taped accordingly. Take your hand off the silver screen. We don't want to push your brain button. You are the book, and as we told you many times before, you can't re-edit anymore. Put your faith in the tape, rest your mind, we shall watch you watch us, we shall not unwind. Spectators are participators. Do not make us push your brain button. Repeat. do not make us push your brain button.

Finish that moccasin, make it accordingly. Sew that bead choker today. Do it for the tape, for your records must be complete. Nobody likes to push your brain button. Stay tuned.

(THIS INFORMATION BROADCAST ON A CELLULAR LEVEL AS A PUBLIC SERVICE TO ETHNIC MINORITIES, CHANNEL, CODE, AND REVISIONS AS SPECIFIED. THIS BIOCAST SPONSORED BY THE CHURCH OF LATTER DAY ELECTRONIC ENGINEERS. REMEMBER. WE'LL SEE YOU AT THE BOX OFFICE NEXT SUNDAY AND MAY ALL YOUR HOLOGRAMS BE HAPPY ONES.)

We made you whole. We made you fit the pattern. We broadcast day and night. We make decisions for you. Take your hand off the silver screen. You are interfering with the projectionist. Yes, we listen, we tell you, you are a book, and having been written, you can not cancel a line of it. Act accordingly.

(ALL TRANSFORMATIONS ARE CLEAR. FORGIVE US OUR TRANSMISSIONS, DONE WHILE YOU SLEEP, AS YOU LAY IN YOUR BED, A HAND OF HOPE CRUMPLED UNDER YOUR CHEEK)

REMEMBER when we wondered how technology would affect us? Then we woke up suddenly, not enjoying the long, long journey and at that moment a jet screamed through the air, whipping across the sky like a death overhead. On the beach, children tried to leap into a jet's shadow. How fleeting we were.

(FROM THE SUPPRESSED VIDEOPOEMS OF IRON EYES CODY)

I used to be a dancer. Now I'm happily possessed. I used to sinfully clothe myself in the central facts of our time. Now, because of the lucky

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cleavage of men into actors and spectators, I remain undressed.

I know you care, I know you'll never cut across my transmission lines. I'll learn and look. I'll promise to remember to forget. I pledge allegiance to the logo and to the station for which it stands.

Forgive me Sponsor, forgive me talking toothbrush, for missing a tooth yesterday morning. I am going to make you proud of me. You'll see a change in my overnight ratings, I promise. No longer will the back of my antenna be resistant to your signal. I am going to be better. I will be content with the "given" in sensation's quest. Before your very eyes, in one stunning montage, in one brilliant, symbolic lap dissolve, you'll see me faithful to the screen, see me metamorphosised from an untamed body dancing on trees to a pair of eyes staring beautifully in the dark.

(A CHILD'S PRAYER OF CONTRITION, BAPTIST HYMNAL, 2074)

"Remember the Alamo! Send free laxatives to Mexico!"

(IRON EYES CODY IN A SPEECH TO DAVY CROCKET—edited out of late-late show telecast)

I KNOW they pushed my button. I used to be the best Iron Eyes Cody that was ever Iron Eyes Cody. Yes, I really think I was. I was always built for action. I fell off horses so well. I got shot very beautifully. I was always very graceful. I was always built for action but I never got the girl. No, I never got the girl. I used to wonder why I never got the girl. Then they rewrote the script and I got the girl by getting myself. I always fell off horses so beautifully.

(NOTE FOUND IN MURINE BOTTLE, HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA, 2074)

I watched while you slept. Wouldn't you be more comfortable sleeping on the other side. We want you happy, we want you rested. We hope you'll stay tuned, we want you 100% refreshed. This is your mattress monitor and, as you have guessed, it's time to turn over. Yes, turn over. We want you to pass the freshness-test. We'll treat you like a guest. Roll over, you are done on that side. For your resting convenience, we are very soft and very wide.

Roll over now, we'll show you how. Do it now, don't delay. We want you at your best. You are our favorite guest. We are the ones to count on to prepare you for a perfect day. Turn over, don't delay. We talk to your kidneys, we are in constant touch. We hope you'll obey. We don't ask much. Failure to comply, we make the kidneys let go. Repeat. Failure to comply, we make the kidneys let go. Isn't it better when the bed stays dry?

(NEURAL TRANSMISSION BROADCAST SPONSORED BY THE EXERCISE WHILE YOU SLEEP CITIZENS ACTION COALITION, A LEISURE SERVICE OF THE NETWORK PRESIDENT'S ADVISORY COMMISSION ON NOCTURNAL EMISSIONS)

We don't like the way the toilet

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flushes. It seems undiplomatic. We wonder. Could its sound be put in harmony? Can you change the rhythm, mute the gurgle, accentuate the flush? We only tell you this because you are near and dear to us. We want your home sounding just right. We want you happy day and night. We don't want to mention it. We really hate to mention it. We hate to mention it but we count. We measure. We are here to insure your utmost in living pleasure. We recommend prunes. We want to see more of you here. You know the danger of becoming a stranger. Wipe away your gloom, let us help you here in the bathroom. We tell you one thing our findings show, you could come here more times than you wanted to go. Trust us and change that flush.

(TOILET DISPENSER BROADCAST, WORDS AND LYRICS BY AMERICA'S FOREMOST VIDEOPOET — JAMES DEAN.)

Remember—we touch you deeply. As you approach sign off, take comfort in the path of transmission. Remember as you travel through life, the world has got you by the golden apples. Take comfort, for your future is now, and now is forever more now. It is audiovisual. Stay tuned. For happiness the number to call is —. Ask for George or Candy. Or both. We are glad you have chosen our lens as the one to look at. We are glad to see you. Be assured we see you. No one ever dies. Repeat. Take comfort that no one ever dies. Although the original telecast has ceased, we promise you shall live on in reruns and syndication. Take comfort in your longevity. Take comfort we say. Channel 10 has picked up your option. Your life will be continued as a children's program. The UNCLE BURPING BUFFALO SHOW. We have signed F. Scott Fitzgerald to play the buffalo. Rejoice in transmission everlasting.

(OFFICIAL FUNERAL TELECAST OF FIRST DRUNKEN WOODEN INDIAN. THIS STATION IS PROUD TO CARRY THE INDIAN FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY. "PERHAPS YOU HAVE SEEN HIS FACE ON THE NICKEL. HE'S THE ONE WITHOUT THE HUMP." SAID THE HIRED FUNERAL COMEDIAN.)

YES, we wrote you as a book, saved you from 2075. Could you live without what we give? We tell you the truth. Don't make us push your brain button. You believe in one armed men. We made you whole and we don't like that very much. We feel, your voice and image is wavering from our purpose. It is becoming soft, muted. We want more lights on your face. Remember we saved you as a representative of your race. We monitor, we pray and we teach. Are you trying to escape our reach? Why do you dream of 2075? We checked, we programmed, we wrote the book. Be glad you're alive. Be glad you have 2074 just once more. You are the kingdom and the book. Watch me dance on the silver screen. There are no words to confuse you. There are no painful choices. No fear of right or wrong. There are no choices to confuse you. We offer you the appeal of two

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words—fear and death. The fear of death. Do you know what we mean? WON'T YOU WATCH US DANCE ON THE SILVER SCREEN.

(TAPED LIVE AT THE HOUSE OF PERFORMANCE IN CALIFORNIA, COPYRIGHT REASONABLE PERSUASION MUSIC CO., ALL RIGHTS RESERVED., 2074. Music to be reasonably persuaded by.)

Remember we made and remade every dream ever played and put them on the screen. We wrote the book. We asked nothing of you, wanted nothing of you, programmed nothing from you. We came into your home. Did you look? Don't make me ask you again? We don't want to push that button. We don't want to send you to that place where lights close their tired eyes. Remember—one-armed men carry imaginary fists at the end of imaginary arms.

(THE PRECEEDING MESSAGE FED INTRAVENOUSLY TO GERIATRIC PATIENTS, CHANNEL, CODE, AND REVISIONS AS SPECIFIED. REMEMBER THE MOTTO OF THE SENIOR CITIZENS PARIMUTUAL BETTING INC.—ONLY FOOLS BET AGAINST THE POOLS. DON'T DIE WITHOUT PLACING A BET—YOUR TIME COULD BE OUR TIME AND YOU MIGHT WIN YET.)

THIS is strictly confidential but I thought you'd like to know, I've been watching you and your hormone count is really quite low. I hope you can correct this. I've watched you, I've programmed your text. Biologically speaking, this monitor recommends sex. Please act accordingly. Your audience loves you. Love them. Refill the lifely cup, we want to see your hormone production go up.

(THIS BROADCAST IMPLANTED WITH YOUR NEVER-SLEEPS INTRAUTERINE DEVICE. THIS TAPE WILL SELF-CORRUPT IN THIRTY SECONDS.)

Was your voice unsynchronised with the image? Was the meaning hidden, the lights too bright? It came out wrong. It was not what we hoped. Believe me, it will not happen again. Buttons will be pushed, brains will roll. Yes, we know we made an error, we have discovered error. Did we miscalculate your sex? Watch the screen. Watch the screen. See us rectify the errors. Remember—editors make mistakes. We wrote the book. We edited the movie for you. Be patient. If you've discovered a mistake in the year 2074, consider it was put there on purpose. We try to put something in 2074 for everybody and some people are always looking for mistakes.

(THIS TAPE BROADCAST ON THE EACH FIRST DAY OF THE SECOND COMING TIME OF THE GRAND AND GLORIOUS YEAR 2074. THIS IS THE SEVENTY-SECOND BROADCAST OF THIS JOYFUL MESSAGE, BROUGHT TO YOU ONCE EACH 2074, courtesy of the unemployed calendar printers union.)

I HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE AND I WON'T GO. (popular folksong from 2074)

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Crazy Horse, his dying words, 1876: I can't help you anymore, tell the people I cannot help anymore. (AS THE DIRECTOR, I HAVE DECIDED THAT THE ROLE OF CRAZY HORSE MUST BE REWRITTEN. IN THE MOVIE VERSION, WE WILL HAVE HIM SAY "ONLY BY MY DEATH, CAN I HELP MY PEOPLE, ONE SMALL STEP FOR MAN, ONE GIANT LEAP AT THE BOX OFFICE." IN PLACE OF HAVING HIM MURDERED BY CALVARY OFFICERS WHO STABBED HIM IN THE BACK, WE ADD A CHASE SCENE WHERE HE ESCAPES FROM PRISON, RAPES AND MURDERS A TWELVE YEAR OLD GIRL AND IS FINALLY DRIVEN TO COMMIT SUICIDE OUT OF GUILT. THE PRODUCER AGREED ON THE CONDITION THAT JOHN WAYNE PLAY THE TWELVE YEAR OLD GIRL)

I knew you'd see it my way. I knew careful editing would make the meaning clear. It was wrong of you to want 2075. It was wrong of you to assume that our art needed you, the spectator, in order to be. It was wrong. The film can run, the tape can play without you. YOU CAN NOT EXIST WITHOUT IT. We insure your existence. We married you when none would have you. We had you. We had you. We had you.

When we start a film, we put out the lights.

(from Webster's Dictionary, 2074 Edition: *suicide*—an unprogrammed act, usually committed without benefit of monitoring devices. Usually a fatal act, a fatal taking of one's life, without being ordered to do so, or recording the act for rebroadcast. 2. A sin of nontransmission at a moment of the highest entertainment value.)

THIS is an official notification to all those suicide prones who insist on depriving their peers from witnessing death. In order to insure that the people are not deprived of the entertainment due them, we have devised a method of taking still pictures of your body and turning it into a film for later broadcasting.

We take the still picture of your dead body, assemble the dead pictures on a traveling matte, and through recent innovations of the multi-plane camera, bring it to life as a film by artificial insemination. This is the meaning and aim of our films.

This is an official notification to suicide-prone monitor tamperers. The people must not be denied their entertainment. Please confine your deaths to monitored periods. The people must not be denied entertainment. Civilization must not aspire for 2075. It is not on the program. Read this book. It is a suicide note. The people must not be denied their entertainment.

(Please watch your monitor. I am committing suicide. The people must not be denied their entertainment. Stay tuned. The people must not be—)

You are now watching a test pattern. The pleasing tone is designed for your listening enjoyment. Our test pattern is designed to be symmetrically pleasing. Are you happy?

The truth about the evils of happiness is on channel 13. Please change your dial for this channel. Repeat. Please change your dial for the truth about the evils of happiness. ★

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SCIENCE FACT

A STEP FARTHER OUT

JERRY P. POURNELLE, Ph.D.

BLACK holes have no hair, but they're fuzzy. Because they're fuzzy, they're not really black.

We haven't space for a chatty lead this month. My Velokovsky article was originally scheduled this issue, but Jim Baen just called to say he's got a novel, and could I do a shorter piece. But if that opening sentence doesn't make you want to read the column, I doubt anything would.

This month we're giving *Galaxy* readers a scoop. Our lag time is shorter than most science journals, so you'll learn why black holes aren't black about as quickly as your friendly neighborhood physics professor will.

Last month I told you that if a chunk of matter gets squeezed small enough, it becomes a black hole. That's about three kilometers radius for our Sun. The equation for the radius, r, in centimeters is

$$r = 2GM/c^2$$

(Equation 1)

for mass M in grams, G the universal gravitation constant, and c the velocity of light.

We call the region that satisfies equation one the Schwarzschild radius. Inside it gravity has become so strong that nothing including light, can escape. Also inside it lurks a singularity that does strange things to time and casuality. [*For a fictional treatment of this theme see "The Schwarzkind Singularity," this issue. —Baen*]

If you watched a star collapse you'd never see it get quite so small as that. Instead it would appear that the collapse had slowed down and everything was now hovering just outside the Schwarzschild radius. The light would get redder and redder, and also dimmer and dimmer, and in milliseconds it would go out.

Since nothing can come out of the hole, we can't see in. We call the region from which nothing can escape the "event horizon," and

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we'll never know what happens inside because of the law of cosmic censorship. If you want to know more about *that*, read last month's column.

CLASSICAL black hole theory dictates several laws of black hole dynamics. Some aren't too interesting, but the Second Law says the area of the event horizon can never decrease, and increases as matter and energy are pumped into the hole. This means that black holes never get smaller. Feed the matter and/or energy and they grow.

That lets us deduce one thing instantly. What happens if a normal matter and an anti-matter black hole collide? Well, nothing that wouldn't happen if two normal matter holes, or two anti-matter holes, collided, of course. The holes eat each other to form one larger than either, but we'll never know which ones contain normal or anti-matter. In fact, the question is meaningless.

You see, black holes have no hair.

This is a convenient way to say that everything we'll ever know about a black hole can be deduced from three parameters. Once you specify the mass M, the angular momentum J, and the electric charge Q, you've said it all. Nothing remains but location, which isn't important for the physics of the hole, but may be for the physicist who wants to study it.

Mass we understand. It doesn't really matter whether that mass is in the form of energy or matter; Einstein's $e=Mc^2$ takes care of that, and down in the hole it's irrelevant whether the rest mass is e or M.

Angular momentum comes from rotation of the object before it collapsed. Naturally it's conserved, so that if the star were rotating, the thing inside the hole rotates as well. It also rotates *fast*, just as a skater speeds up in a spin when she pulls her arms in.

The last parameter, charge, is just what it says, and it gives us a way to move a black hole around. If it isn't charged, feed it charged particles until it is, then use magnets to tow it.

The laws of black hole dynamics say you can never recover the rest mass energy (that's the Mc^2 energy, of course) of the original body. It's lost forever. Even shoving anti-matter down the hole gains you nothing.

However, you can get energy out of a spinning black hole. Up to 29% of the rotational energy is available, and in the case of a star that's a *lot*. To get it you throw something down the hole, and one of the things that comes out is gravity waves.

In our experience gravity waves are puny things, but we're a long way from their source. Up close is another matter entirely. You could be torn apart by them, as the characters in my story, *He Fell Into a Dark Hole*, very nearly were.

Most of what we know about black holes comes from Stephen Hawking of the University of Cambridge. Many physicists think Hawking is to Einstein what Einstein was to Newton, and he's still a young man. This year Hawking has

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added quantum mechanics to classical black-hole theory, and he's ruined a lot of good science fiction stories.

SOMEWHAT over a year ago Larry Niven and I went out to Hughes Research Laboratories in Malibu. The laser was invented at Hughes, so of course they do a lot of laser research there. They're also among the top people in ion drive engines, and they've done a lot with advanced communications concepts.

All that was fascinating, but we went to talk with Dr. Robert Forward, who's known as one of *the* experts on gravitation. I'd met him because he liked my previously mentioned black hole story (nominated for a Hugo last year, but alas . . .) and had been kind enough to call and tell me so.

Bob Forward is the inventor of the Forward Mass Detector, a widget that can track a tank miles away by mass alone. It can't distinguish between a tank at a mile and a fly on the end of the instrument, but if you use two and trianguiate you're safe enough. His detector can also be lowered into oil wells, or towed behind an airplane to map mass concentrations below.

After lunch we talked about black holes. Dr. Forward was particularly interested in Stephen Hawking's then-new notion that tiny black holes might have been formed during the Big Bang of Creation. Since the Second Law predicts that they never get smaller, there should be holes of all sizes left. Some might be in our solar system.

They would come to rest in the interior of large masses. There might be quite a large one inside the Sun, for example—and in the Earth and Moon as well. A hole of very large mass, say 10 exp 8 kilograms, would still be tiny: about 10 exp -19 centimeters radius. An atomic radius is around 10 exp -9 cm., very large compared to such a hole, so that the hole couldn't eat many atoms a day, and wouldn't grow fast.

Readers will note that I'm being kind to typesetters. Obviously 10 exp -19 means 10 to the minus 19 power, just as 10 exp 8 means ten to the eighth. I'm using this convention because we had sad experience with the "Belter" column some time ago; between the typesetters and the printing some of the column made no sense. *Galaxy* readers who don't understand powers of ten notation should go find a highschool (new highschool; they didn't teach that in *my* day) text and learn, because you can't deal with very large or very small numbers without it.

Anyway, black holes inside the Earth or Sun aren't too useful because they're hard to get at. Bob Forward wanted to go to the asteroids. You search for a rock that weighs far too much for its size. Push the rock aside and there in the orbit where the asteroid used to be you'll find a little black hole.

You could do a lot with such a hole. For example, you could wiggle it with magnetic fields to produce gravity waves at precise frequencies. There might be all sizes of holes, even down to a kilogram or two.

It sounded marvelous. Larry and

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I figured there were a dozen stories there. I'd already written my black hole story, and Larry hadn't, so he beat me into print with a thing called *The Hole Man.* All I got from the trip was a couple articles and columns.

Well, Larry's story has just been reprinted in his new collection, while the columns I did about little black holes have been forgotten—I hope!

I'm glad I have nothing in print about tiny black holes, because Hawking has just proved they can't exist. Oh, they can be formed all right, but they won't be around very long. It seems that black holes aren't really black. They radiate, and left to themselves they get smaller all the time. The Second Law needs mosifying.

STEPHEN Hawking's new paper hasn't been widely published yet because he submitted it to this year's Gravity Research Foundation prize essay contest. The GRF was founded by Edison's friend, stock market analyst Roger Babson. It's been around for many years, and received scornful treatment in Martin Gardiner's *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science.* It may or may not have deserved that in the 50's, but for a number of years the leading people in gravitational theory have been entering the competition.

Hawking won first prize from GRF in 1971 with his paper on cosmic censorship and black hole dynamics. This year he took only third prize, first going to a Cal Berkeley astronomer. Even third prize was enough to tear Larry's *The Hole Man* to shreds. (Not that Hawking ever mentioned science fiction; but then the Pioneer probes weren't intended to wreck all our stories about Jupiter, either.)

Hawking points out that Einstein's general relativity, which produces most of the primary equations for black holes, is a classical theory. It doesn't take quantum effects into account.

Hawking corrects this. In quantum theory a length, L, is not fixed. It has an uncertainty or fluctuation on the order of L_0/L, where L_0 is the Planck length 10 exp -33 cm.

Since there is uncertainty in the length scale, it follows that the event horizon of the black hole isn't actually fixed. It fluctuates through the uncertainty region.

In fact, the black hole is FUZZY, and energy and radiation can tunnel out of the hole to escape forever. It's the same kind of effect as observed in tunnel diodes, where particles appear on the other side of a potential barrier.

Since black holes have no hair, although they do have fuzz, the quantum radiation temperature—that is, the rate at which they radiate—must depend entirely on mass, angular momentum, and charge.

It does, but I'm not going to prove it for you. Hawking uses math that I *can* tool up to follow, but I'm not really keen on Hermetian scalar fields, and I doubt many *Galaxy* readers are either. If you want his proof, send a dollar to Gravity Research Foundation, 58 Middle Street, Gloucester, Mass 01930 and request a copy of Hawk-

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TABLE ONE
MASS, RADIUS, AND LIFETIMES OF BLACK HOLES

Description	Mass (grams)	Radius (cm)	Lifetime (seconds)	Lifetime (years)
Kilogram	1000	1.48×10^{-25}	10^{-19}	----
Billion gm.	10^9	1.48×10^{-19}	.1	----
2365 tons	2.15×10^9	3.19×10^{-19}	1	
---	6.7×10^{11}	9.9×10^{-17}	31.5 million	1 million
---	6.7×10^{13}	9.9×10^{-15}		10^{10}
---	1.5×10^{15}	2.18×10^{-13}		10^{36}
Ceres	8×10^{23}	1.2×10^{-4}		Eternal
Earth	6×10^{27}	9×10^{-1}		
Sun	1.99×10^{33}	3 kilometers		
Galaxy	10^{11} suns	3×10^{16} = .03 lightyear.		
Universe	10^{22} suns	2.95×10^{27} = 3 billion lightyears.		

ing's paper *Black Holes Aren't Black.*

Hawking shows that the temperature of a black hole is,

$$T = (10 \text{ exp } 26) / M \text{ °K}$$

(equation 2)

where M is mass in grams, and the lifetime of a black hole in seconds is

$$t_L = (10 \text{ exp } -28) M^3$$

(equation 3)

Using my new Texas Instruments SR-50 that handles scientific notation and takes powers and roots in milliseconds, it wasn't hard to work up Table One from these equations.

There are more numbers than we need, of course. It's a consequence of the pocket computer. Not long ago I'd have had to use logs and sliderule, and I'd have done no more than I needed. Now look.

The first thing to see is that small holes have uninteresting lifetimes. In order for one to be around long enough to use it, the hole must be massive.

Any black holes formed in the Big Bang would be 10 exp 10 years old now; so if they weren't larger than a small asteroid they're gone already. Worse, that exponential decay rate defeats us even if we find a hole just decayed to an interesting size. It will still vanish too fast to use.

So there went Larry's *Hole Man*, and two stories I had plotted but hadn't written, and I suspect a lot of other science fiction as well. Sometimes I feel a bit like Alice when she protested, "Things *flow* here so!"

But it's what we get for living in interesting times, and it ought to teach my friend Larry not to rush into print ahead of me . . .

NEXT month Velikovsky, and I hope I have some friends left after that one's out.

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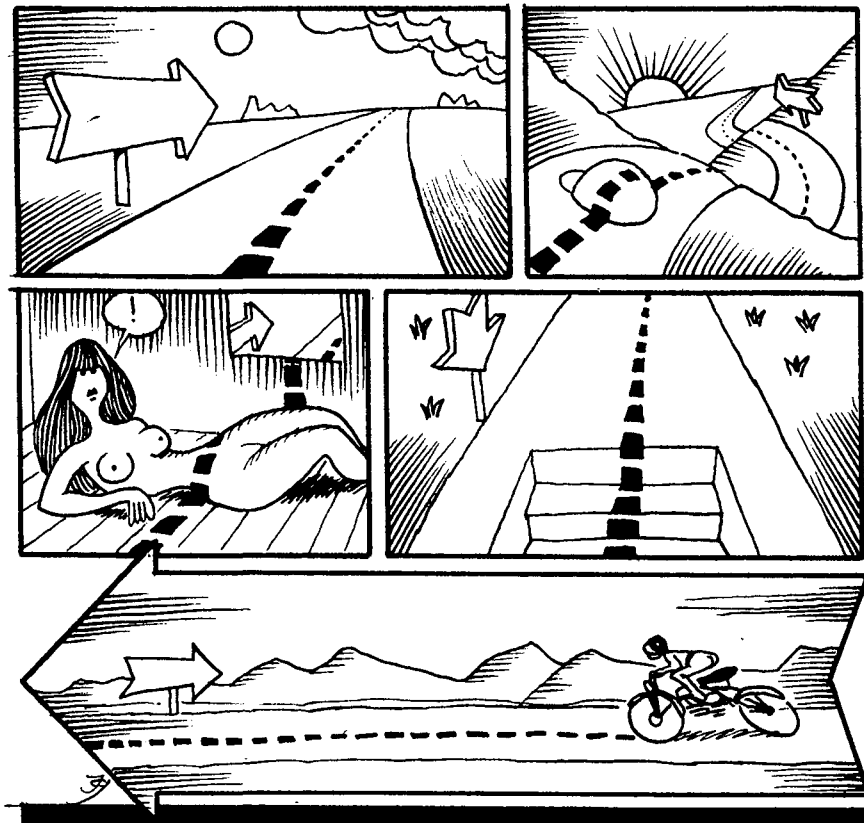

THE SCHWARTZKIND SINGULARITY

A fairy tale for physicists.

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W. S. DOXEY

BEYOND the outskirts of Ramur the elephants at last pulled off on the shoulder of the highway and, sounding my brass horn by way of saying *Phhooot!* for all the precious time not to mention trouble they and their handlers had cost, I downshifted to third and picked up speed, seeing in my mind's eye what awaited me at kilometre 8, a mess of badderlocks fried in safoil and perhaps one or two cold glasses of excellent frog-toddy.

Oh yes, I was exercising my mind's eye quite well, thank you, when rounding a downward sloping hill what should I have to drag both feet to avoid dashing into but a squat structure of gray stone piled up in a rather clumsy imitation of ashlar masonry. I mean the bloody centrestripe ran directly up to, and I supposed, under the oak door, above which hung a small brass bell shaped rather like an irregular star.

Well.

I caught my breath and dismounted, feeling my brake pads while doing so and noting that the sudden stop had caused them to heat rather much. I recalled not without dread that I hadn't any extras. (Since the region beyond Ramur is hilly this fact was of great importance.) Of course, I could always improvise—had done so with amazing success in other races—in fact was known by some sports-writers as the Great Improvisor.

Still, I hadn't planned to waste so much brake material on a building that had absolutely no business, that I could then determine, blocking the road. I mean there were cliffs maybe ten metres tall on either side—solid granite with a hint of diorite—and the structure was jammed in between. In my mind's eye I saw myself laboring to get myself and the racing bike up the front wall and across the slate roof. That would drain quite a bit of speed from my gluteus maximus, medius and minimus and might well cause mild coxalgia, which racers must avoid at all costs.

Of course I was prepared; in my carry-all I had thoughtfully stowed crampons and claws—not to mention rings, pinions, pulleys, and a length of nylon rope.

So I dismounted, caught my breath, and considered the door, underneath which, as I have already stated, the yellow centrestripe seemed to run. Doors are not what you would call my best friends. In previous races my record against them is rather dismal. The first which confronted me I opened with optimism and had my innocent smile bashed in by a lurking medicine ball, placed there by my enemies, of whom I was at that time unaware. And—to summarize with one last example—there was the ornate mahogany door on the route from Ciudad Juarez to Belize, behind which waited a slightly ravenous anaconda *Eunectes murinus.* Close call, yes, thanks to an anabatic breeze from the Gulf of Honduras.

But getting back to this door, the

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one smack in the middle of the highway beyond Ramur.

Well, I rang the star-shaped bell, stepped back, hands to the front, set for anything, anything at all.

I heard voices. Chanting. I listened. Schoolboys, it sounded like and, yes, they were reviewing the Curie-Weiss Law, by rote I supposed.

So I knocked and rang the bell again.

Not that I'm anti-education. But my lead in the race, while good, wasn't impossible for a determined foe like Kip or even Pretorius to overcome. And the elephants had delayed me.

THE door opened inward. I followed the stripe across the threshhold, where it ducked under a pair of neat, tan oxfords. My gaze elevated. By golly, standing before me was a splendid little chap wearing a handsome fawn-colored suit, with spots, tailored of, I judged, pina cloth. Around his neck dangled a silver chain and whistle, of the type used aboard warships. His face was rather round and I noted immediately his curious gyrus.

"Yes?" said he.

"I beg your pardon," I replied, "for interrupting, however—."

"You are sweaty, quite."

"Yes, well, actually I've involved in this—."

"Bicycle race, I assume, seeing that you have such a machine with you."

His blue eyes twinkled. I peered past him at the classroom. Sure enough, the yellow centrestripe continued down the aisle between the desks, then climbed the wall several feet, and leaped out an open window. Upon the chalkboards flanking this opening were neatly printed such marvelous bits of info as:

40 bushas = one R

and:

1000 fils = 1 JD

as well as:

myristic ACD = $CH_X(CH_Y)_ZCOOH$

"As a matter of fact," he said, "we are preparing for recess."

The students nodded.

"During which time we shall be most happy to help you."

Having seen the dusty portrait hanging in the lefthand corner beside what seemed to be a worn Christmas tree was that of Baden-Powell, I said, "Jolly decent of you."

"You are wondering about the highway," he declared. "I shall explain. The Department of Public *Werke* changes the roads around for variety. Cuts accident rate, they claim, by breaking monotony. Beware of all road signs—seldomly mean what they say."

"Confusing," I said.

"Perhaps, until one knows. But rest assured—eventually you *will* reach your destination, perhaps sooner than expected."

I glanced over my shoulder.

"Maintaining a slight lead, eh?" he said.

"And getting slighter. See here, all of this is most stimulating, but what can I do? Mind if I duck through the window and be on my way?"

"What? Without sharing our hospitality?"

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A fine looking young lad wearing the red and blue class uniform popped to his feet and cried out, "We have some splendid sagger baked cookies!"

Another declared: "And a refreshing clyster!"

"Saggers will be adequate, with a whiskey sour, of course," said their teacher. And having so ordered the boys he turned back to me and continued. "We must help you."

"I was doing well enough by myself, till now."

He frowned. "I was not so much concerned about your fate as the instruction of my charges." He pointed to the likeness of Baden-Powell. "Would be contrary to his philosophy to allow a chance such as this to pass. Boys!"

The class came to attention.

"To the armory, double-time, h'arch!"

They moved off smartly through the window.

Now we drank our sours and munched cookies, iced with star designs which tasted more like plaster than sugar.

He said, "They'll return in a jiff and then we'll cook up a very warm welcome for your foes."

"Not foes, competitors."

"As you like."

The boys leaped through the window and formed a rank, air rifles at the ready. "You will deploy," said the teacher, "according to Clausewitz Sonata for Light Infantry in E-Major. Fire when you see the flash of their spokes. Move out!"

And out they moved, as the teacher donned a dayglo rubber helmet and said, "Make your move

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now. Through the window. Follow the highway. You are equipped?"

"For anything," I replied.

"Excellent!" He extended his hand. "Luck!"

"And you," I said.

THERE were questions I longed to ask; however, the open window beckoned, and in moments I was once more in the race. The highway beyond the building rose quickly to a hilltop. At the summit I glanced back and saw the students, sans uniforms, formed up in several triangles flanking the road down which Kip and Pretorius would soon be coming—unless during the lag between myself and them the *Werke* Department had rerouted and by their quirk put those two ahead of me.

Well, that thought made me think of what to do.

My trusty Onflichter .19 was strapped with scope, bipod, and shell-case to the crossbar. If things became too critical I was allowed to try for a rim or chain shoot. Of course, should I miss and draw blood I'd be disqualified.

But I hadn't a target, yet. So I settled for another measure by pulling to a halt and breaking out the ketch-rig sails. That was the right move! The mountain wind puffed out the blue and green gala sail, and away I went, feet resting on the pedals.

I had time to observe the land through which I raced—an experience rarely experienced. Cowberries were in season. Their purple flowers blended well with the white moschatel and pachysandra, while repant oxalis formed a splendid reseau through which peeked a host of snakeroots.

Abruptly, the wind died and the highway left this altiplano in a breathtaking descent which demanded all my cycling skill. Reefing and furling with one hand, steering with the other, I negotiated the twists and turns through gathering shadows, till I passed through a layer of refreshingly moist cloud and fairly popped like a cork from vintage champagne, perhaps Rothchild '47 or Funderburk '51, on to an eight-lane concrete freeway, bathed in the pink tones of a setting sun.

Adjusting my course to the third lane from the right, I bent low over the silver BeFortage handlebars and endeavored to make up for lost time, all the while keeping one eye on the rearview mirror, just in case.

The freeway rolled on and I with it for several kilometres, then it narrowed like a bottle's neck, wheeled left, rose, lessened again to eyedropper size, turned into a dirt path, and brought me to a curious wooden bridge hung across some sort of dark gorge, out of which came the tumult of struggling water and a great deal of vapor, reminding perhaps of lilac or owl's-clover, if you know what I mean.

So, there was this bloody bridge, a fitting spot for a murder. I tested it with one foot. It swayed but otherwise seemed sturdy enough. Still, no use to risk all. I looped my rope over a thick oak limb close by, ran the rope through the steel safety link on my all-purpose belt, knotted it neatly, and allowed the untied portion of the nylon to play out of my pack, through my

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fingers, and back to the limb. Thus, if I should plunge into the gorge, I could pinch off the free end and make my way out, having, of course, secured my bicycle by gripping the frame between my legs.

However, I reached the other side without having to put this plan into effect. As I drew in and recoiled my rope the idea came to fix the bridge in such a way that it would cause Kip and Pretorius a bit of trouble. Not that I dreamed of cutting the supports clean through! Half-way would be good enough.

But I resisted this impulse, and since it was now after sundown, switched on my head and tail lamps and followed the highway, which began to widen a bit and to show signs of halfhearted attempts at paving. On either side the shoulders were buttressed with immense piles of scoriae. Atop of one the beams from my lamp illumined a host of Centruoides gracilis meditating upon the moon, which even now was making its slow rise through the stars.

Ah, that was a tranquil leg of the race!

But then the beeper pinned to my blouse informed me that I was hungry, and there was neither drive-in nor cafe in sight, nor sign promising one, till I made the next turn and found myself coasting toward a massive steel gate which, luckily, swung inward to admit me.

I was in a park of some kind. Yes, I plainly made out in the glow of quaint iron lamps beds of flowers and at least six fair sized Dragon Trees in full bloom. The driveway upon which I rolled seemed to be of brick, perhaps in the Roman style. At any rate, there was no going back for the gate slammed behind.

And so I went on, noting Poincianas, Jackarandas, and Quamas in orange, purple and silver bloom, hearing the soft little cries of sapajous, the moans of howler monkeys and, thanks to my amazing scotopia, seeing in the darkness a pleasant enough pond whose beach was festooned by legions of parading yellow and blue crabs.

AT LAST, however, the drive ended. I stopped before a bucolic cottage made of white cinchona and, I supposed, satin wood. Brushing a few pesky Zancudos from one eye, my left, I dismounted, set the McGregor "Standfast" kickstand, and knocked upon the door.

It opened immediately.

"Yes?" said a rather large woman, naked save for rings on her ankles, very large rings, of gold, I judged.

"Ahum," I began.

"You're with the race," she declared. "Come in."

"How could you know that?" I started to say. But didn't. Something was up, I sensed it. Yes, no doubt she was in the pay of my opponents. I must be on guard.

And so I went in.

My beeper beeped again.

"Hungry?" she said. "I have just the dish for you."

"Of poison?" I almost replied. But then what should I hear but laughter of a most pleasing sort. It seemed to come from a large red and blue mail box beside the hearth.

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"Oh dear, aren't they having a good time, though?" she said. "I mean my girls. Not mine, really, but my students."

"This is a school of some kind?"

"But of course! What did you suppose?"

"I had not, till now."

She beckoned with her meaty hand. The mail box swung back to reveal a damp stone staircase lighted by sputtering torches. "Shall we go down? The girls will want to make your acquaintance, and there is food available too. Please, you first."

I hesitated, then plunged down the stairs which opened onto a narrow corridor cut from living rock. After several twists we came to a huge chamber. Red and green lights burst off and on like pulsing stars. I blinked, then saw in various comfortable positions upon the floor a host of delightful young women and not a few men, who seemed rather fatigued. They were engaged in such play as one might observe in Masters & Johnson's *Handbuch.* Two absolutely perfect misses were playing ride-the-horsey with two gentlemen. I don't know what came over me, perhaps I wasn't thinking clearly due to the trials of the race, but without a moment's delay I rushed over and almost became guilty of involuntary Gomorrah.

She giggled and exclaimed, "Better luck next time, handsome!"

My hostess laughed and clipped me a good one on the backside, saying, "My sentiments, exactly!"

"Yes, well," I fumbled, "it's been a long day, and—"

Language, handmaiden of Thought, failed.

I mean what should I notice upon the dangling foot of one gentleman but, yes, a recognizable shoe! Purple upper crafted of shark leather; gold neoprene laces; sole of woven hemp. Done special by Addidas these shoes were, and for whom? Why, the eleven man crew of ZEP *Santos-Durmont,* known more commonly to those who followed the dirigibles as ZEP-88, odds-on favorite to win the Transworld Lighter-than-Air Derby. But it had disappeared, vanished, and the squat DIR-512 *Plulp* had come in first, paying sixteen-to-one.

"And you are starving," said the hostess, handing me a bowl from which spun wisps of steam smelling rather like pumpkin. "This is our favorite dish," she said. "Don't be bashful. Plenty where that came from."

I did not dare ask where, exactly, it had come from. But sat down on the floor and gobbled it down, without looking.

I must say that actually it wasn't half-bad, whatever it was. I felt invigorated, revitalized, and so, putting the bowl aside, got the attention of the fellow I'd spotted and said, "By the way, the weather out is splendid. And that's a very interesting shoe you're wearing."

"I am barefoot," was his only reply.

Seeing that he did not particularly care to converse, I shrugged and glanced about the chamber. In one corner stood a large, glass-fronted case in which were arranged not a few objects, two of which caught my eye. Now, the lighting was not good, but since

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my vision is perfect I am quite sure that they were the shirts of my opponents. The silver and gold 7/1 numerals of Kip were very plain, as were the 4/4 in burnt orange and forest green of Pretorius.

Well, I was on the brink of pondering this turn when my hostess pulled me up and said, "Come, I'll show you our class rooms."

She drug me through any number of spacious rooms devoted to such pursuits as horticulture and synesthesia and canon law. At last we arrived at a laboratory where several lovely young ladies were conducting an experiment not unknown to me. They were having some difficulty, so I stepped in and said:

"Your problem is that the jellyfish, *Cyclosalpa pinnata,* must be oriented east-west upon the pewter dish, like so. And now, if you will give me the metal rod. Thank you. Behold!"

I tapped the edge of the dish. A brilliant phosphorescent light sprang from the specimen and threw our shadows in stark relief along the wall.

I acknowledged their applause with a simple nod and, not wishing to overstay my welcome said, "It's getting late and I am involved in a race. Best hit the road, you know."

"Nonsense!" cried the lady. "You must spend the night. It is snowing on Chimborazo. The pass will be blocked."

"There are ways of circumventing snow," I began.

"Naturally, I anticipated you would act thusly," she said, "and so, for your own good and the sake of the race, I slipped a little something extra into your food. Aren't you drowsy in the least?"

Before I could answer I fell asleep.

Perhaps I dreamed. I usually do. But I cannot recall of what I dreamt.

I AWOKE with the dawn outside the iron gates. A tray of breakfast was on the soft grass beside me. My bike stood waiting.

I, of course, ignored the food and downed three low-fat racing pills stowed in the carry-all. Then, having checked tire pressure and brake cables, mounted up and spun away, at the same time wondering how I could've missed the left turn which, last night, would've enabled me to avoid the girls' school and its terrible delay.

Soon, however, the road steepen-

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ed and all my energy was required for pedaling, so I turned off my mind. Up, up, up into the dark clouds I drove myself, lungs bursting, gasping for oxygen. A sign edged in black said: "CHIMBORAZO straight ahead."

There was snow, of a sugary kind, and ice. I stopped to put on chains, then rattled off again, expecting the worst, at least.

But no, the road dipped down, down, down, and in moments I sped through a pleasant pasture grazed by an enormous herd of springbok. It was then I noticed something extremely curious. My shorts were gone. I stood on the pedals to make sure. Yes, no doubt, they *were* totally gone.

Someone, some—, I mused. But of course! The trophy case! The shirts and now my shorts! A dastardly trick, but I could not repress a smile, which, incidently attracted a large purple butterfly who smacked into my white teeth.

Luckily, they had not taken my "John Henry" supporter, so I was in no real danger. Unless I happened through a village populated by prudes or appreciative ladies or alert homosexuals or—

Perhaps I was in some danger. But so be it. Part of the game of racing, and if it came to a showdown, well, I was a crack shot with the Onflichter .19. Wouldn't catch me with my—that is, well.

And so, head down, legs wheeling, I drove myself onward, raising behind a wonderful plume of dust. The road signs promised ice and slippery surfaces, soft shoulders, dangerous curves, so I knew I had nothing to fear.

However, when before me loomed a baby blue and pink sign saying "CLEAR SAILING AHEAD, DON'T WORRY," I applied brakes and skidded to a halt before a broad river.

The water ran deep, the water ran dark. I fancied green eyes peering up from the depths. The other shore, if there was one, was shrouded in gray mist. Periodically a moan rose remindful of fog horns.

I laughed.

The lengths to which these people went to make their race interesting was absolutely amazing! And I had expected something of a marvellous challenge near the end. What better than a forbidding aqueous expanse?

Whistling a merry tune, from Reichmark's *Donner und Blitzen,* I believe, I quickly inflated my all-purpose gum rubber raft, fitted the bike aboard, tensed the guy wires, and shoved off, carefully shifting into low gear so as to counteract the current's sweep.

I passed the wreckage of several wheeled vehicles, one of which might have been a bicycle. Another I recognized as a curricle—yes, the drowned horse was still between the traces. A seagull perched upon his head and nodded back as I passed.

Into what? Why, the mist, of course, and beyond, into clear golden sunshine and a spotless white highway neatly landscaped with cedars. Ah, the odor was a delight! But the road, there was something familiar about it—yes, it looked to be exactly the same bit of highway that started the race!

Of course, I couldn't be sure.

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But I sensed I was almost to the finish of the race, and to another victory, for Kip and Pretorius were nowhere to be seen.

Ping!

Ping! Ping!

I steered into a convenient haycock and took cover, at the same time checking my person and equipage.

Zing!

"Close, but no cigar!" I yelled.

There were telltale dimples on the rim of my rear wheel.

Zing!

Ping!

Ouch! Shot zigged off my helmet. Ears rang. I rubbed my eyes and sneaked a peek through the hay. Something moved in the cock twenty yards away. Yes, motion, and now came the glitter of a rifle barrel. At a glance I saw the unique ribbing and horn sights characterizing the Dinkler .21.

Kip was potting me, or—I saw a flash of gold—no, it was Mrs. Kip, his mother.

Rats!

Of all the lousy luck, to be pinned down by that woman! I mean she was *really* overprotective. The hay parted a bit more and I saw her clearly, saw the gold ring in her nose, saw even the green patterned haik she always wore—had something to do with the Kip tribe.

"Mrs. Kip, dear lady, it's only me!" I called out.

By way of reply she fired twice into my straw and hissed, "I know, that's why I'm shooting."

I frowned, then smiled. "Does this indicate that your son has not yet passed this point?"

"Ask him when you see him!"

Aha, I reasoned, Kip had not yet passed. I was in the lead, provided of course Pretorius was behind Kip.

"You are forcing me to take measures!" I cried.

Zing!

Well, I had warned her. It was out of my hands now. I considered trying to pot her with my .19, but recalling the great meals of hawksbill soup and filigumbo she'd rustled up for us in happier times, and taking into account the fact she was, after all, Kip's mother, I decided on a less final solution.

I fired my SOS rocket in a carefully determined trajectory so that after bursting it would float down on her hiding place, then settled down to wait. In moments I heard the sirens, then the whish-whish of the choppers, as they winged in at tree level to give aid.

They dropped their huge steel grapples into the hay. On the second pass they hooked Mrs. Kip—I decline to say where—and sped off for home base.

And once more I was on my way down the homestretch, riding hell-for-leather for the checkered flag.

But I had to stop at an eight-foot chainlink fence, beyond which, through scrub pine and palmettoes, I could see the track on which we had to finish.

Now what was I to do? I mean the road ran directly into the fence. And I had no way of knowing if the wire was safe.

I was standing there, chin in hand, when I heard a bell ring, ring, ringing. Coming down the road toward me was a figure on a

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bike! I shaded my eyes! Merciful heavens, there were two figures!

Kip was bent low over the handlebars, and behind him, rising now on the seat to get a clearer look, was Pretorius. Apparently, they had joined forces against me. I heard them yowl, laugh, saw Pretorius shake his fist and urge Kip on to greater exertion.

Well, things did not look very good. I mean, the two of them working together could get over the fence quickly, and then—

I shuddered to think of them taking the flag.

So I took immediate steps to insure they would not by simply falling on the group, grasping my right thigh, and moaning.

They slid to a stop. Kip bounded over the bars and hit the pavement running. Pretorius steadied the bike and smirking, said to me, "Looks like you're out of it, eh?"

"Help me, please," I implored.

"Sure," said Kip, "we'll screw up your other leg."

They moved up to the fence. I called out, "Stop! The wire may well be electrified!"

That gave them pause, but only for a moment. "You'd like us to believe that, wouldn't you?" said Pretorius. "You'd like us to waste time here while you recover, wouldn't you?"

"He'd like it," said Kip.

"Well, we won't!" exclaimed Pretorius, bending over and making a cup of his hands. "Here, Kip, I'll give you a boost."

Quite a boost it was.

I mean, the voltage made a delightful rainbow through Kip's body into Pretorius' and thence into terra firma. I let them stand there like glowing statues for a minute, or at least until the circuit breaker up the line blew out and the wires went dead. They seemed welded together, but I detected breathing and eye flicker. They would soon be ready to ride again, so I had to hurry.

Over the fence went my bike, followed by me.

The brambles and weeds clutched at my bare flanks, but I was not to be stopped this near victory. No, I reached the track, righted my bicycle, found the proper gear, and took off.

Let me say right now that this track is really two tracks in one or, to be more exact, a pair of ovals forming a figure eight. At the start of the race each rider had first to make one complete circuit then exit for the crosscountry via an escape road at the pinch, or narrows, as the spot where the ovals join is called.

All right.

I FOUND the entrance lane at the narrows and followed the track, pulling myself together in fine racing form to oblige the hordes of media representatives which, I knew, would be milling with cameras and mikes at the end. Oh yes, I really moved out, around one oval into the other, around it, and in the distance made out the finish, the wooden stand hung with patriotic bunting, even heard the rumble of the crowd.

Only as I came flashing closer I saw something wasn't quite right.

I mean the banner above the track didn't read F-I-N-I-S-H.

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No, instead it bore the letters S-T-A-R-T.

I slowed, pondering this, then speeded up again, reasoning that there was actually no real problem. The course was a circuit; therefore, the end was the same as the beginning.

And so, standing up on the pedals and giving the overhead clasped hands sign of victory, as well as my most photogenic smile, I crossed the line of shadow cast down by the banner, slowed to a gentle, graceful stop, and awaited the mob's welcome.

Silence.

Somewhere beyond the stands in the woods a bird made a cackling sound.

I looked to the judges' stand. They sat fanning their sweaty faces with palm fronds.

"Ah, I say there," said I. "Beg pardon, but did I come by so—ha-ha—fast you didn't notice?"

Lord Klutz, chief judge and publisher of the Beaver State *Racing Bugle*, looked down upon me and, yawning, declared, "My dear fellow, you're a bit late, don't you think. The race began days ago. Why, at any moment we expect the winner."

Another judge, I believe it was Dinzu Xblit, Knight of Asphodel and Keeper of the Seal of Blinn, said, "Has he had his shots? Is his passport in order?"

I was on the point of making reply when the crowd loosed its finest roar.

The checkered flag fell.

Kip and Pretorius crossed the line.

My protest was disallowed, the ruling handed down being that two men on one bicycle did in no way constitute a breech of the peace and in fact showed great resourcefulness, not to speak of grit. So the bronze trophy was cut down the middle, as was the cash prize, and I was left with nothing.

In fact, I was left with somewhat less.

My finish so amazed everyone that by unanimous vote I was declared invisible, the reason being that I had gone in the wrong direction, reversing time in a most singular manner and attaining, for now at least, a prodigious mass which precluded the reflection light and, consequently, rendered me a dark spot.

I could not stand for this treatment!

And so I remounted and commenced to rerun the race, chasing my own shadow, as it were and, I hasten to add, catching it just before Kip and Pretorius set out.

As I ACCEPTED the trophy and granted exclusive interview rights to several reporters, my opponents foamed. "Schwarzkind, you are a cad!" Pretorius opined.

"And a cheat!" said Kip.

"Perhaps," I replied, "but I have beat you again. And, as usual, I am a star. Eat your hearts out."

This they fell to doing, while I signed endorsements for baby food and the Quark Motorcoach Company, Ltd., of Panama City, Panama, securing enough in the twinkling of a pen to insure my participation in the next race, which was even then being sonorously announced from the judges' stand. ★

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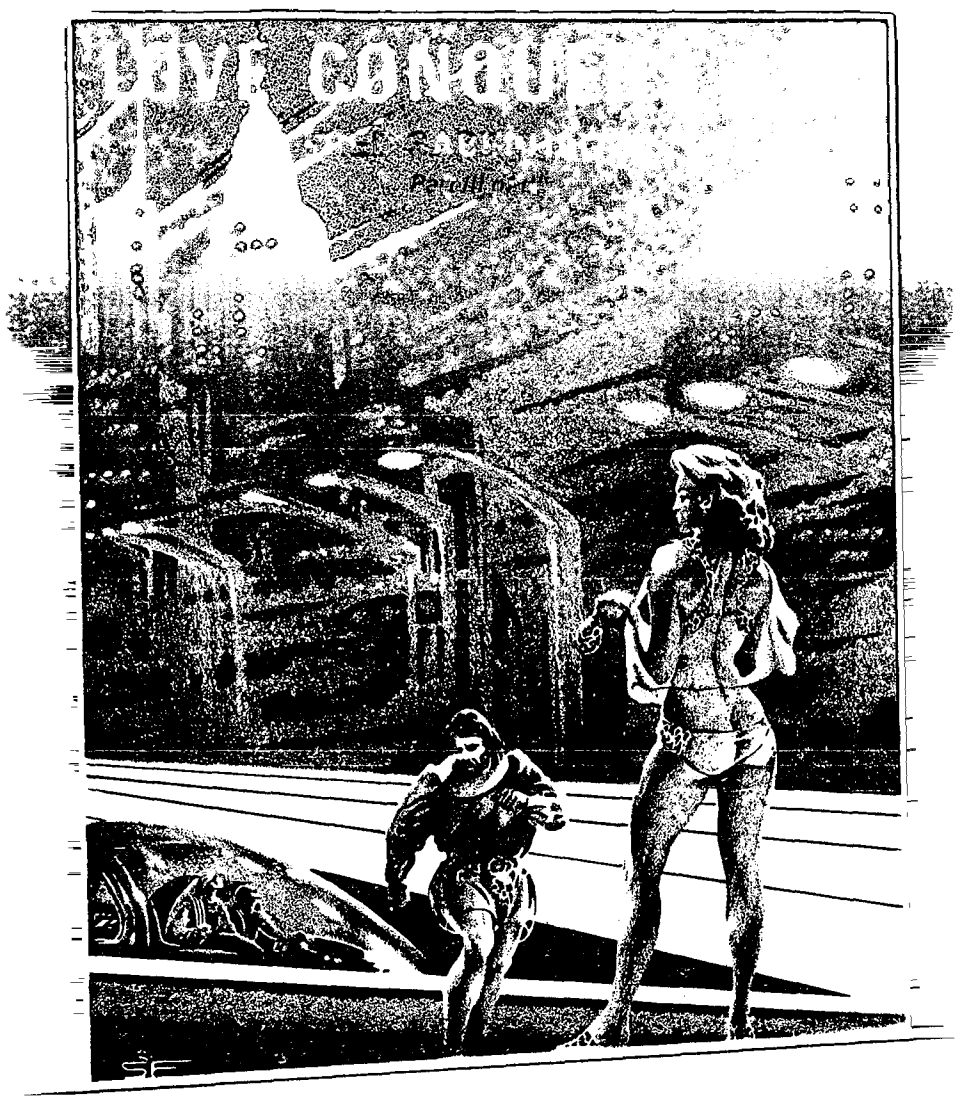

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

By the twenty-first century the earlier revolution in sexual morals had advanced to the point where chastity, and the repression or sublimation of sexual impulses were considered social offenses if not actual crimes, but were still sought by many as secret pleasures. Most members of the Establishment belonged to the Church of Eros. Concurrently, crowding and hunger in

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the world had led to severe restrictions on reproduction even among the wealthy. A woman who had borne two children was required by law to have any subsequent pregnancies aborted.

ART RODNEY, *California electronics engineer and chessmaster, finds that his wife,* RITA, *has fled to Chicago to locate a midwifer and bear a third child rather than have the abortion required by law. Art pursues Rita to convince her that her plan is both wrong and dangerous before it is too late.*

Art's transcontinental tube train is halted at the Mississippi. Under attack there by rioters is a monastery of Christians (a sect long in decline) where experiments on preserving life in freshly aborted fetuses are thought to be under way. Art helps a distraught girl named ROSAMOND JAMISON *get on the train for Chicago.*

In Chicago, Rita's brother GEORGE PARR, *a karate master, and his wife* ANN, *LIVE LIKE many other city dwellers in a complex of townhouses fortified against the random violence of the age. Art arrives to find that Rita has come and gone, leaving the two Rodney children with Ann, a militant free-birth advocate and Christian.*

Art convinces the Parrs that he must be allowed to talk to Rita face to face. George takes him on a tour of the city, supposedly to arrange the contact but really to confuse any Family Planning agents who might be watching them. High points on the tour are a stadium where the unemployed are paid to watch baseball, and a slumburb tavern where Art hears a disheartening broadcast of world news. George takes Art to his karate dojo where Fred, who wants George to hire him as an instructor, has come to be evaluated. Fred fails in combat against humanoid karate-machines. One of George's students, Dr. Hammad, is introduced to Art as the man who can arrange his meeting with Rita . . .

Fred, gloomy and wounded, goes in search of some gladrags (opaque plastic cloaks) to facilitate his planned sublimation-affair with Marjorie. At the Megiddo Coffee House Fred falls in with some apish companions.

A meeting is arranged between Art and his wife, who is in hiding while her anonymous doctor, an acquaintance of Dr. Hammad's, makes preliminary tests. Art is blindfolded and driven to see Rita in the former nurses' quarters of a maternity hospital—that with the changing times has been converted into a sublimation-brothel. When Art realizes his beloved wife is staying in a whorehouse he tries to drag her out by force but the bouncers subdue him. Exhausted, he is almost seduced into sublimation by one of the girls, who takes him for a customer. Desperate now, he decides to take his problems to Family Planning and throw himself and Rita on their mercy.

Outside, opposing picket lines of the Homo League and the radical Young Virgins clash as Art arrives at the building. In the lobby, he finds he cannot betray Ann and George to the law as the midwifery conspirators they are; he dashes out again, and is knocked unconscious in the riot.

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Musing at home about Art's and Rita's problems, George and Ann hark flashback to their own meeting and early life together; George's saving Ann from apes on a California bus, and their first sublimation together, on the night she missed her high school's orgiastic Senior Prom. We see what has only been implied earlier, that to members of this society the deliberate refusal (repression, sublimation) of a sexual impulse can sometimes be a transcendental experience, intense and important as orgasm was in an earlier age.

Art wakes up in a hideout where the Young Virgins have brought him, having mistaken him for one of their own casualties as they fled the riot scene with the arrival of the police. Art is being treated by a Christian priest-doctor on the lam for midwifery—in fact the very man who is about to deliver and freeze Rita's fetus. While waiting for a skull X-ray, Art notices a glassy tank and, peering within, discovers a three-month-old human fetus . . .

THE surrounding light was quite dim, and the tank's only window a tiny aperture that allowed a clear view of the thing only from certain angles.

Art stepped closer, staring, then abruptly relaxed. There was no umbilical cord, only a blind knot of tissue at the navel. For a moment he had thought that the complex of equipment before him (besides the tanks and piping, there were three oscilloscopes, counters, and other gear that Art could not immediately identify) was in fact an artificial womb, and that the fetus before him had been frozen and revived, or was at any rate in some sense viable. But now he realized that it must be only an abortus being used in some experiment. Tubes, or only wires perhaps (he could not be sure in the dim light) were attached to it inside the tank, but without an umbilical cord, he supposed, it could not be receiving oxygen and nourishment. And he could see no placenta, or analogue of one.

There it sat, or rather floated in an upright sitting posture. The thing that so much fuss was made about. It was small, only about the length of Art's middle finger. Its proportions were much different from those of a normal full-term infant, and of course even further from those of an adult, but the thing was unmistakably *genus homo* all the same. What other species would develop a bulging brow like that, or hold up two such human hands? When Art bent closer, the fingers were fully distinguishable, as were the toes at the end of the insignificant legs and feet. What with the shadows and the angle of his view, the sex was not quite visible.

He jumped back a step with a quick intake of breath, and only then was aware of the doctor standing watching him at the corner of the screen a couple of steps away.

"Feel all right?" the doctor asked. "You shouldn't be on your feet unnecessarily."

Art raised a hand to gently touch the side of his head, at a good safe distance from the wound. He turned his gaze back to the tank. "It moved."

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"Oh yes, they move. I've located the X-ray film at last. Get back on the cart if you will and we'll finally be able to make sure about that head of yours. Yes, the little girl in there happens to be about the same developmental age as Rita's fetus is right now. About three months as near as I can tell. At that age they've usually been moving spontaneously for several weeks, though the mother usually can't feel the movements yet."

Art walked away, pausing at the corner of the screen to look back once. "I didn't know it was . . . there was no cord."

The doctor held out a hand to give support if needed. "Oh. But we usually take that off at parturition. Tapping into the circulatory system elsewhere serves the purpose, and has some technical advantages. Yes, she's very much alive and growing. That's her heartbeat you can hear in the background, sounds like a clock or watch? And with those scopes back there we're continually monitoring brain activity; that won't settle into the regular rhythms for a few more weeks."

Art lay back carefully on the cart, settling his head down gently on the pillow. "Is that a living human being?" he asked the fluorescent lights above. The vision of the grotesque, half fish-like head was still before him, and the tiny hands, that seemed about to be raised secretively, protectively, before the face. "Is it?"

"You tell me," the doctor grunted, moving the cart in the direction of the X-ray. Art now noticed the thick shielding hung between the machine and the artificial womb at the end of the laboratory. The doctor continued: "Frankly, I've had my doubts. Sometimes I feel I don't know where to start in thinking about it anymore." His tone was mild and preoccupied; now he had begun a delicate positioning of Art's head beneath the X-ray snout.

Art, still looking at the ceiling, said: "Maybe it doesn't matter if a fetus is a human being or not. Maybe such a question is meaningless."

"Take a deep breath—hold it, don't move." There came the usual audible hum. "All right, you can move. What do you mean, it doesn't matter? You know, if these embryos and fetuses turn out not to be individual human beings after all, then I and some of my friends have gone to a hell of a lot of trouble and broken a hell of a lot of laws for nothing."

Art twisted on his cart. "You just said that you yourself have doubts."

"*Doubts,* yes!" The man was vexed. He waved a piece of blackened film. "I might have very strong doubts that there's a child under that overturned box I see in the middle of the road, but that doesn't justify my running over it with a truck, not without some life-or-death reason to run it over. Damn, this one didn't come out as clearly as I'd like. Let's try again. Turn on your right side this time, if you will."

"How about the welfare of society as a whole? How about overpopulation, people starving? Aren't those life-or-death reasons?"

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"To cut off the life of that little girl in there? In a word, no. Take a deep breath, hold it. That's fine."

Allowed to move again, Art got up on one elbow. "I suspect neither of us is going to be able to change the other's mind on this by arguing."

Art said: "All right, I know that thing in the tank has the potential for someday being a full human being, with all the rights thereof. But not yet, surely not yet. It may generate a brain wave or two but it can't think, it may twitch but it can't act. It couldn't survive for three minutes without artificial help."

"Neither could you if you had a really massive coronary. And she could have survived quite well in her natural environment, had we been able to leave her there." The gray-green eyes gave the pictures a final stare and then turned to Art with evident relief. "You're all right. This second picture makes it unanimous. No fracture. You ought to take things easy for a while, but you can go."

"Tell me. Why does that have to be a baby? Why must you break the laws, as you admit doing, to make that point?"

THE doctor sighed, and let himself down in a chair beside the paper-burdened table, as Art sat up on the cart and reached for his shirt. "Art, I can't make it a baby or not a baby. I can only try to determine which category it already belongs to, and conduct myself accordingly." He wearily rubbed his eyes. "Damn it, it *looks* like a baby now, right? In a few weeks it may begin to suck its thumb. A cute little human touch, hey? Not necessarily convincing."

"Wait a minute. How about gill-slits? Doesn't it still have those, or didn't it at an earlier stage? Are they cute little proofs of humanity too?"

"All right, the gill slits. What do *you* think they prove?"

"I . . . nothing. How am I supposed to know? You're the scientist, or at least the expert, though most of the scientists and experts don't seem to agree with you on this. What has you so convinced?"

"Art, I know of no solid scientific definition of man. What can I communicate to you? Only facts, and people interpret them in different ways. Both parents of that organism in the tank were human, of course. But its cells are different from either of its parents' cells; it is now a genetically unique individual.

"It . . . no, I have to say *she*. What you see as a thing in a tank I see as a little girl. But if you try to pin me down on when she began to be a little girl, I'll have to admit that I just don't know. Teilhard says that the beginnings of all things tend to be out of sight. Was a unique human soul infused when the sperm first pierced the egg? When the nuclei of the two parent cells were first completely united? With implantation of the blastocyst in the uterine wall? Maybe a few days after that, when the time of possible twinning had passed."

"If you're bringing souls into it, you're leaving me out." Art was off the cart now, getting dressed. In the background the steady tick-tick-tick went on, soft and rapid.

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"Just let me get out of here."

"Of course." As if caught derelict in his duty, the doctor jumped up and went to push a button near the door. "I can't help bringing souls into it, though I tried. I'm a Christian priest as well as a doctor, you see. I suppose if one's humanity is questioned one must try to prove it by appealing either to God or to a board of review of other human beings, who sit in judgment. I know which I prefer to do."

"No one is questioning your humanity, doctor."

"Not now. But some future government might decide that I belong to an inferior race. Governments in the past have made such pronouncements about people. Or, if I suffered a stroke tonight and still hadn't come to by next week, my fellow physicians might by then be questioning my continued humanity." He rose from his chair, hands clenching. The naturally fierce look in his eyes grew more intense. "Maybe it *would* be the kindest thing in such a case to let me die. But I would still be a *human being dying,* not a—a specimen reacting!"

"All right," said Art, in slight alarm, speeding up the fastening of his shorts. "Take it easy."

"Yes, I'm sorry." The tall man let himself slump back into his chair. "In my opinion there are a few rare situations where abortion may be justified, at least if there's not an artificial womb available. But it's still a *human being dying,* being killed, and there's not many reasons to justify that. Surely not some non-specific good intended for the world in general."

Art, dressed now and putting on his watch, shook his head. "Do you think a single human being dying matters that much to the universe? Appeal to your God if you want, the rest of us haven't heard anything from him lately. We have to look out for ourselves as best we can."

The priest-doctor pulled himself to his feet once more. "Let me go and find someone to drive you home. We'll feed you something first if you care to wait for it."

"No, I'm not quite through talking yet." Art moved to stand between the other and the door. "You are about to inflict a third child on me and my wife, because your God wants you to. The least you can do is listen to me for a minute longer."

Abruptly the priest turned fierce again. "I am sincerely sorry for the danger and expense and inconvenience that the third child is going to cause you. But it is still better than inflicting death on your third child. If you find his presence unendurable, why there are people in the world who will take him in."

"People in the world! Yes, I'll say there are." Now they were standing almost toe to toe, Art with his arms folded like an umpire. "About eight or nine billion at last count. And how many of them are starving now?"

"Quite a few are starving, Art, quite a few. Maybe you've seen more of them than I have. Maybe you've fed more of them. Maybe you promote contraception more enthusiastically than I do."

But Art seemed to have stopped listening. He stood staring, with

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an altered expression, into a corner of the room. The priest looked there and saw only a red picnic cooler with a white handle.

"Art, here, sit down again. I'm sorry, we shouldn't have been arguing."

"No, I'm all right," said Art. But then he did sit down in the chair the other brought for him. "That cooler over there. I believe I may have carried that across the Mississippi a few days ago. It was very heavy and very cold. Now I'm just realizing what must have been inside it. That was while your monastery out there was burning down."

"You were there?" The priest sat down again too, and leaned anxiously toward him. "Can you tell me anything of what happened? I've seen and read the news stories, but . . ."

Art told what he could, leaving out the name of the girl for whom he had carried the container. "And the man with her said, 'That was Steve' before he took off running into the woods. That's about all I can tell you."

The priest-doctor nodded, hands clamped on his knees, squinting as if in physical pain. "Yes. Those two men were both my friends. Neither of them mentioned in the official accounts. Maybe the police never knew they were there."

"I'm really sorry," Art said impulsively. "At the time there didn't seem to be anything I could do."

"Of course not, Art. It's not your fault. Listen, I'd better get you on your way home before I'm charged with kidnapping. But you must be hungry, let us feed you something first."

"Maybe just a protein bar. I never got around to thanking you for this patch-up job, did I?" Art brushed a hand gingerly over his scalp bandage. It wasn't nearly as big as he had expected, and very little of his hair had been removed.

In a few minutes one of the stalwart Young Virgins brought him a couple of bars on a plate, and a glass of milk. As he munched, the priest-doctor asked him: "Would you object very strongly to a blindfold when you leave? I'd accept your word if you gave it, but some of the other people here might not."

"Blindfold? Oh, I don't care." Art was abstracted again. Foodbar in hand, he got up suddenly and went to push the white screen aside.

Like an idol in a temple, he thought suddenly. Surrounded by its screens and paraphernalia like an idol, or a statue on an altar. Suddenly the minuscule statue frowned at him, averted its blind face, then stretched an arm.

Not an idol, then. Far more than that. Inscrutable as a flower or a nebula, it could only be contemplated, not understood. Tick-tick-tick. And again the firing neurons in its developing brain smeared green traces across the three oscilloscopes.

SHAKING hands with the doctor on his way out, Art said: "Thanks again for the treatment. You know if I could find a way I'd still stop Rita from going through with this. Because of the kind of world we have to live in. But I wish it wasn't so, I wish the world would

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let your way be possible. Anyway, you tell her that I want her back, whatever happens. I want that most."

"I'll tell her, Art. I'll be very glad to pass that word along."

XI

AT ONE o'clock in the afternoon Art, once more shrouded in an opaque cover (this one smelling more medicinal than musty), was led out of the laboratory and out of doors, across an area of long weedy grass and uneven paving stones. Then he was put into the back seat of a car, where without being told he hunkered down so as to be invisible from the outside. The car when started jolted slowly over rough terrain for about a minute, before getting onto any kind of a regular road. Shortly Art began to hear the noises of other traffic around him.

"You can come up," said one of his Young Virgin escorts, in apologetic tones, only about five minutes after the start of the trip and somewhat before Art had expected any such permission. He pulled the blanket gingerly from his sore head and eased himself up to a normal position in the seat. The car was traveling through some middle-class, jobholders' residential neighborhood that Art could not recognize. One of the two youths escorting him sat beside him in the back.

"Sorry, we're not going to be able to take you all the way to the Parrs' house," the driver said, apologetically. "It's possible their place is being watched—you know how it is."

"I don't know whether I do or not. Not any more."

"Pardon?"

"It's all right. I can walk."

"Oh, oh," said his other escort, swiveling his head to peer back through the rear window. As it turned out, Art didn't have far to walk at all. The police car with its blue lights flashing came alongside and nudged their vehicle neatly to the curb with its foamy plastic bumpers.

FROM the questions the police asked before the van arrived to cart the three of them off to the station, Art gathered that his escorts' car had been somehow identified as one used by participants in the morning's infamous Family Planning riot. All its present occupants were under grave suspicion, the sullen one with the lump on his head being no exception. When they unloaded at the lockup he was taken underground to a large cell with padded walls. He recognized it as what they called a DD, or drunk-drug, tank on the tv crime dramas. In real life he found it crowded not with thrashing drunks or druggards, but with loudly vocal Young Virgin types, several of whom complained steadily to the walls (where perhaps there were microphones to listen) of their real or supposed injuries.

Nobody else was listening. "Shuddup in there," advised a loudspeaker in the ceiling, from time to time. In reply to this the Young Virgins would usually break out into a verse of all but unintelligible song. Approaching Art through this milieu, smiling as if at

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an old friend, came a suddenly familiar face: that of the sign-peddler of the morning.

"It's just a mistake I was picked up," Art could hear the sign-peddler saying, as the latest outburst of song was ended. "My signs were useful, weren't they, to let the world know what was going on? A man tries to be an influence for peace and communication in the world, to mediate the intelligent expression of differences in the community, and this is the thanks he gets. Hey, bud, which side *were* you on?"

"Shut up," said Art Rodney.

Now another fifteen or twenty prisoners were being brought in a group, adding to the crowding and confusion. These looked like Young Virgins too. Presumably any Homo League members arrested were being held somewhere else, in the interest of relative peace. The corridors under this station seemed to be lined with these tank-like cells, and through the corridors drifted the steady animal murmuring of innumerable inmates. There was also a noticeable amount of dust in the air, and the muffled roar of heavy machinery at work nearby. Maybe more cell space was being excavated.

At last three policemen came to the door of Art's cell, and set up a table there for processing. "One at a time now, people. Form a single line. Come up here and present your identification and we'll take your fingerprints. Then you can make one phone call. Form a single line."

A Young Virgin girl, a beautiful girl with dark devilish eyes, pushed herself forward to the table and demanded: "How about separate facilities for men and women?"

The policemen who had already spoken eyed her warily, his lined face on guard against any of these young punks attempting to get smart. "Separate what?"

"Latrines!" The girl waved at the open urinals and water closet at the rear wall of the cell. "We want to have separate latrines for each sex, with walls closing them off."

The cop's hardened face showed disgust. "Oh, and no doubt you'd like to open a brothel in here, too. You'll take what the city gives you, and do your carryin' on outside of jail."

As if that were the answer she had hoped for, the girl stepped back smiling. With a gesture and a yell she started up another loud song, all the Young Virgins within earshot quickly joining in. But their rebelliousness now seemed strictly verbal; they were not slow to line up before the table for processing. Jail probably grew quite boring in a couple of hours, and it was now time to call one's parents to get one out. Art used his weight and his elbows in self-defense, refusing to be pushed to the rear.

Someone shouted at him: "Do you know the song?" It was a comradely voice, coming from just behind Art in the newly formed queue. The speaker was a tall young man, wearing a sweatshirt with STUDENTS FOR A CHASTE SOCIETY handpainted on the front; something about him looked vaguely familiar to Art.

"No, why should I know your song?" Art answered, as soon as

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the noise of it had trailed off into silence and he could talk without shouting. "I was just caught up in all this by mistake."

"That's the way it was with me," said the voice of the sign-peddler, from up near the head of the line.

"Are you with us, though?" asked the devil-eyed girl ahead of Art. As the line was just about formed she had squeezed her cloth-shrouded body in just ahead of him, her eyes daring him to protest.

"I'm not with you or against you. I just happened to get caught up in this."

The girl's eyes, those of a determined persecutor, attacked Art's beard and the conservative translucency of his clothing. She was silent, perhaps making plans.

The tall young man demanded: "Sir, if you're really not with us, *why* not?" His tone was meant to be not threatening but inspiring. "Now I judge you're a man who has supported the Establishment in the past, who has upheld all its outworn dogmas and twentieth-century creeds. And now it's thrown you into jail anyway. What good has worshipping the sex gods and goddesses ever done you? Think about it."

"Oh, shut up," said Art, and shuffled forward with the line. If it came to posting bond, he didn't have a great deal of money.

He never knew what Rita was feeling—those had been her words to him. Why couldn't he have started, sooner, to find out? Until he knew what she was feeling it made little sense to argue with her. Of course she should have shown him similar consideration, talked to him more, found out what *he* really felt. Maybe they weren't so utterly, terribly far apart as it had seemed when she ran away. He didn't want her having another baby, of course . . . but if she was going to, anyway, if she really had to do it, then he wanted to be with her while it was going on. Now it was too late even for that. He wouldn't be able to reach her until the thing was done.

"Everybody be careful!" cried the devil-eyed girl brightly. She had been whispering with a couple of girl friends, and now she was ready to have some more fun with Art. "Everybody on their proper behavior while Mr. Whiskers is here. Maybe we should all undress a little."

"Now, Eunice," chided the tall young man. She wasn't helping his recruiting drive at all.

At least Art was soon going to have a chance at a phoneplate. Did he have the nerve to call George and Ann, tell them that he had been caught in a riot in front of the Family Planning building, and ask them for help? Not if he could help it. Better if he never saw them again until this whole thing was over—but of course, his children were there. He had no choice but to call the Parrs.

"I do hope they let us out soon," said Eunice. "I want to pack as much sin into my life as I possibly can!" She stepped defiantly up to face the sour policeman at the cell door. Art followed in his turn.

AFTER being fingerprinted and filling out a short routine identity form, Art got his chance at

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the phoneplate. Behind him other prisoners were waiting. Reluctantly he punched the Parrs' number, and felt more relief than anything else when he was answered only by George's recorded voice telling him that he might leave a message if he wished. He left no message and after a moment's thought his relief turned sour. Maybe the Parrs had been arrested too, and his children were now in some orphanage.

He was allowed one completed call. Who else in the city did he know, where else might he turn for help? There was the dojo, but he couldn't remember either its name or address. There was Dr. Hammad. Ugh. After thinking a moment longer he dug a piece of folded paper from his wallet and, without much hope, punched numbers on the phoneplate once again.

"Jamison residence," said a male voice, answering through a blanked plate on the other end.

He cleared hsi throat. "I'd like to speak to Rosamond Jamison, please."

"Who shall I say is calling?" The voice had some thick and awkward tones in it, those of a man who would rather be doing something more manly than taking messages on the phone.

"Tell her it's Art Rodney. Tell her the man she met on the tube train from California. She'll remember."

"The tube train. All right, wait just a moment."

Art waited, gazing around him. The prisoners in line to use the phone looked in their frozen impatience as if they expected him to forget about his call and get out of their way at once. And now the nearby police were all watching Art, silently, with peculiarly blank, controlled faces. He hadn't noticed them doing this when other prisoners were phoning. If it was just a game they were playing to make him nervous they were succeeding.

"Hello?" It was Rosamond's voice. Then on the phoneplate appeared the image of her pretty face, the cat's-eye lenses gleaming. "It *is* you, my handsome protector! I'm so glad! I've been hoping you would call, and Daddy has too, he's wanted to thank you."

With the corner of his eye Art noted, without understanding, that the nearby policemen had suddenly all lost interest, were turning away and getting back to their jobs. "I'm glad I could reach you," he said. "I'm afraid I need help, and I don't know where else to turn. The police have made a mistake, and they have me in jail here—"

"Wha-at?"

"I innocently accepted a ride with some strangers," which was quite true, "and it turned out the police were looking for their car. So now I'm being detained for questioning, as they put it. I'm held for investigation on a charge of conspiracy to riot, something like that. I'm not sure I have it straight. I was hoping you might be willing to call a lawyer for me. Or something. I'm afraid I don't have much money with me, and—"

"Oh my, oh my. Poor Art. How do you spell your last name? And what station are they holding you at?"

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He spelled his name for her. "And the sign here says Tenth District Detention."

"Just wait there, wait!" Rose counseled him excitedly. Then she blanked off.

Art took a step away from the phone and a policeman was there to touch him on the arm and beckon him away. This officer, for a change, had a friendly-seeming smile. He led Art down a corridor to where a bulky, middle-aged man in civilian clothes was sitting behind a desk. On the desk were computer printouts whereon appeared small photographs of Art, both full face and profile. The bandage on his head with the small bald spot around it showed on the photos, and he wondered when and how they had been made.

The bulky man looked up. "You're Mr. Arthur Rodney? I see here that you're from out of state. Did you know when you accepted a ride in that car that the police were looking for it?"

"No, I—no."

"Well, we find that there's no evidence to the contrary. We're very sorry about the inconvenience, but you can understand that we can't take any chances."

"I suppose not."

The man behind the desk nodded in a friendly way, and the interview seemed to be over. Another smiling policeman, this one in uniform and with an unusually large number of stripes on his sleeve, was holding open a door at one side of the desk as if he expected Art to pass through it. Beyond the door was an ascending escalator.

After he had started up, and realized that what appeared to be a public lobby was at the top, Art asked: "This means that I'm free to go?"

"That's right, sir." The smiling sergeant had come with him onto the rising stair. "By the way," he added, his voice lowering, "if you're talking to—anybody, you can let'em know that the men on the force are a hundred per cent behind the campaign to get tough with the apes and get'em off the streets."

"Huh?"

They had reached the marbled public lobby on the station's ground floor. With a gesture the smiling sergeant directed Art's attention to where the air-curtained main doorway stood open to the world.

"I'd better wait here for a while," said Art. "I think someone's coming to see about getting me out."

"That so?" The sergeant winked. "Tell'em they needn't have bothered. Still, you're welcome to wait for'em here if you like. Have a seat. Excuse me, I'd better get back to work."

"Certainly." As soon as the man had gone, Art went to a public phone booth in the lobby and tried the Parrs' again. To his surprise, Ann answered the phone almost at once.

"Art, what's up?"

He stood with his head held high; maybe the bandage wouldn't be noticeable at that angle to the plate's pickups, with his hair sort of piled in front of it. "How are the kids?"

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"Why, they're fine, fine. How are things with you?"

"I tried to get you a few minutes ago, but no one answered."

"I was just out in the park with the children. George is working. Where are you calling from, Art?"

"I'll—be talking to you again, soon, Ann." With that he blanked off.

HE WENT to sit in the marbled lobby, and watched the public flow in and out at a brisk rate. All these people were involved with legal trouble in some way, even if they were only reporting it, so he supposed it was natural that they should look frightened or dazed, or indignant or stony-faced. What bothered Art was that now when he looked out the window at the throng passing the station on the slidewalk, the faces out there looked much the same.

He had been sitting there less than ten minutes when Rose came in. She spotted him at once, smiled, and came marching clack-clack across the lobby on new hard-heeled sandals. It struck him now that her walk was somewhat too childlike and bouncy for a normally mature young woman. She was wearing a red bikni, daringly opaque all over and almost padless. Art stood up and greeted her with an embrace.

"My good friend Art! How have they treated you?"

"Fine, ever since they heard me talking to you on the phone. Before that they practically had me sentenced, and now they tell me I'm free to go."

Rose laughed prettily, and linked her arm in his. "Then let's be going. We have lots to talk about on our way."

He walked out of the station with her, asking: "Did you call a lawyer?"

"I thought you couldn't be in any serious trouble," she said obliquely. "Here, get in." She was unlocking the door of a very expensive car parked right in the NO STANDING zone in front of the police station. The Illinois license plate was number four. *Four.* Great sex, had his luck changed at last?

He got in obediently. "Where are we going?"

"I want to take you home with me, Artie. I told you, Daddy's been anxious to meet you."

Once in on the driver's side, Rose scanned the readiness indicators on the dash, as a cautious driver should, and then punched keys quickly. Then she sat back and turned to Art, giving him a long, unfathomable look while the programmed car started its engine and radared its way out into traffic.

"Artie?"

"What is it—Rosie? Do you like being called Rosie, by the way?"

"Yes, I do like it." She tilted her head, making the lenses shimmer beautifully. Probably in days of calm she practiced with them before a mirror. "Artie, my father's a very nice man, a kind man. He's not one to fly into rages or anything like that."

"Well. That's fine." He supposed she wanted him to ask some favor of her father for her. "Just who is your father, by the way?"

"He's the bishop, silly. Church of Eros archbishop of Chicago.

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Everybody in Chicago knows him. Artie, we really are good friends, aren't we?" Taking Art's hand, Rose swung his arm back and forth over the seat between them. It was a childlike action, and when a basically sexy girl like Rose did it, a man could be tempted toward serious repression. Especially a weary man drained of his energy to fight. The vision of her crouching on the riverbank, veiled by his dirty shirt, rose in his mind's eye but he managed to thrust it down.

"Of course we're good friends, Rose. Any time I can do you a favor I hope you'll let me know."

"Today I just want you to meet Daddy." She giggled.

"I'm looking forward to that. Especially . . . Rose, I won't lie to you. Especially now that I know he's someone with influence." An hour ago Art had been ready to resign the game, but now things might be just a little different. "Because you see I have a problem, one that I really need help with. I hope your father may be able to at least give me some advice on it."

The cat's-eyes seemed to offer sympathy. "It isn't a really big and nasty problem, is it? Oh, I hope not."

He laughed feebly. "Big and nasty enough. Oh, I haven't murdered anyone, so far."

Rose snatched her hand away. "Don't say things like that! Don't even make jokes about them!"

"I'm sorry." He hadn't realized how sensitive she was to even the suggestion of violence. He looked around them. "Do you live nearby?"

"Not far." The neighborhood through which they were now passing looked much like that around the Parrs' home, except here the blockhouses were set even further from the street, occupied larger plots of land, and their walls looked even higher. Just ahead was one whose granite walls were extra high.

"We're almost home, my big handsome protector."

The car measured the traffic and the traffic-spaces around it, chose an opening and shifted precisely to the street's curb lane, then signalled for a turn and dove onto a ramp that swept it down beneath the granite walls. A man in a guard's booth gave Rose a casual wave which she returned while switching the slowing vehicle back to manual control. The steering gear folded out of a panel into her hands and she drove on.

Here as in the Parrs' block the underground garage was divided into visitors' parking areas and private stalls. Rose turned into what appeared to be the largest stall, with two cars parked in it already, and room for several more.

She switched off the turbines and turned to Art again. "Artie, if your problem is—nothing like the horrible thing you joked about—then you can tell me what it is. In fact I think you'd better tell me, before you go in and meet Daddy."

"Rose, it has nothing to do with violence. It's somewhat similar to—your problem. To the problem you were faced with when you and I first met."

She had pretty teeth and moist, full lips. "However did you figure out what that was?"

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"Oh, just putting two and two together. I know now what you must have had in that picnic cooler."

Now her lips were pouting. Was she going to cry? It seemed to Art that without eyes her weeping would be tearless and therefore repulsive. "Not that I care what you were doing, Rose, not that I'm in any position to talk. It's just that my wife is now having difficulties along a somewhat similar line. I don't know that your father would be able to help me with that kind of a problem, or that he'd want to get involved in it."

Rose dabbed with a tissue at her nose, and yes, at her lidless lenses too. "I'm glad you understand, Art. What happened to my fetus is another thing my father mustn't know the truth about." (*Another* thing?) "Of course he thinks that I simply had it aborted. But I can't even think about such violence, let alone permit it inside my own body. Ugh." A final dab and a deep breath, and she smiled and was back to what passed for normal. "Now you'd better listen to me for a minute, Artie. Because I haven't told *you* everything yet."

SOMETHING about those words was ominous. Art leaned back in the car's luxurious seat, closing his eyes for just a moment's rest. He checked his watch. A little past three. Then he turned and looked into Rose's lenses. "What is it you haven't told me?"

Once more she took his arm. She became clinging. "Oh, Artie, I was just desperate. You see, there's a man I . . . like. I like him very much indeed. In fact I've come to— to revere him."

"Revere!"

"Art, I put my fate into your hands. I know you won't betray me. Just recently my father has found out that I'm having an affair, or at least he's become very suspicious. But he doesn't know who the man is, and I didn't dare confess the truth, because . . . anyway, I didn't dare. So today I told him that it was you."

"Oh." Art closed his eyes again. He supposed he could push Rose out of the car, seize the controls, and go roaring up out of the garage, perhaps crashing through the barrier at the door. Transporting illegally frozen fetuses. Rioting. Midwifery. Auto theft, gate-crashing. Was there a crime called gate-crashing? There would be. No previous convictions, or even arrests, that Rodney must have been a clever one. But sooner or later the most cunning criminals trip themselves up. They say he seduced a bishop's daughter, that's what really wrote finis to his career. They say just the other day he was in the Family Planning office, bold as you please, talking about an appointment with the director himself. They say . . .

"Artie, dear?" Rose's voice dripped honeyed anxiety. Probably she didn't even like to be called Rosie. "Artie? I was just desperate, or I would never have done it. I had no one else to turn to, and I just had to keep Daddy from finding out who my true cavalier really is . . . Art? Oh, I promise it won't be so bad. Daddy really did want to get you out of jail, even after I told him you were the one."

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Art nodded slowly, meanwhile keeping his eyelids firmly closed. If he could somehow get out of the bishop's dungeon here and reach the Parrs' castle, maybe Ann could hide him under a bed and no one would ever find him. Drape him in an opaque sheet. But that might constitute another crime. Oh, chastity, what a mess. Maybe he was dreaming.

"I was just in despair, Art, when suddenly you called. Then it seemed so logical for you to be the man that I told Daddy you were. Don't you see? Art, are you all right? *Poor* Art!"

Poor Art opened his eyes. Now then, what did he have to do to attain success and happiness? Meet the bishop and prove himself innocent of Rose's seduction. Then, with or without ecclesiastical help, find Rita and get her safely aborted, while keeping George and Ann, and Rita and himself of course, clear of the law. That about covered it.

He opened the car door and slid out. The situation was clearly beyond worrying about, and from that fact he derived a kind of second wind. Bring on the bishop.

"Shall we go in, Artie?"

"Oh, why not?"

Rose led him directly from the parking stall through a double door that might have served to guard a bank vault, and up a private escalator. The door at the top was opened by a huge man, rough-looking though well dressed, who eyed Art with suspicion. Art in turn suffered a momentary fear that this was the bishop himself.

Rose said: "Jove, this is a friend of mine, Mr. Rodney. Daddy wanted me to bring him home so they could get acquainted."

Jove grunted. "Have'im wait here and I'll see. Or would you rather go in, Miss Jamison?"

"No, you go, I'll wait with Art." She took Art's arm and they stood there in the elegantly carpeted hall like a couple waiting to be married.

"The bishop's chief bodyguard?" Art asked, when the giant was gone.

"Yes. Don't mind Jove's rough manners, he's really quite sweet." She squeezed his arm meaningfully. "So's Daddy. Now I put all my trust in you, darling."

Jove was already coming back through the plush hallway. "The boss says you should bring him on in. Hey, Miss Jamison, you're looking real hot. I'm off duty in a little while, could we maybe get together for some sex?"

"All right, Jove, I'll see you in the chapel. Art, dear, let me introduce you to Daddy first."

At the end of the hall Rose tapped on an old-fashioned wood-paneled door, then pushed it open without waiting for an answer. The room revealed was a large study, the walls lined with bookshelves and tape-racks. A massive, brown-skinned old man rose from an armchair and favored Art with a mild smile of greeting. The bishop wore the exaggerated white codpiece of his office, under a vaguely transparent robe.

"Daddy, this is Art. I've been telling him how nice you are, and that he really had nothing to be afraid of, meeting you. Now I want you to *be* nice to him."

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"Why, I'm generally sociable, dear." The old man accepted his daughter's kiss on his worn sagging cheek. "Dear, why don't you buzz away now for a little bit? Mr. Rodney and I are going to have a chat."

"Sure, Daddy. I expect I'll be in the chapel with Jove if you should want me." Turning toward Art with an expression that was doubtless meant to be encouraging, Rose stepped past him and out of the study. Art, who had reached out his arm mechanically, caught himself at the last moment and let her go without a good-bye pinch. They were supposed to be having an affair, and possibly, just possibly, he would want to maintain that fiction.

Bishop Jamison was still smiling. "Mr. Rodney, that sofa there is very comfortable. And how about a drink? I have vodka and bourbon and beer and even a little sherry on hand."

"Uh, thank you sir. Your Potency. Bourbon on the rocks would be fine." Art sank resignedly into the sofa while his host turned away. Poison in the whisky, maybe? He would drink it anyway.

THE room might have been the study of any successful and conservative man, though, not surprisingly, there was a somewhat heavy emphasis on religious art. Rodin's *The Kiss* in nearly lifesize reproduction. *Leda and the Swan,* there on the wall, by one of the newer photographic masters. Painting had been dead for a century now, along with poetry and story-telling, or so most of the critics said. And there of course above the mantel, *Love Conquers All,* Caravaggio's Cupid trampling triumphantly the symbols of the occupations by which man sometimes allowed himself to be lured temporarily away from his true master, Lust.

The old man was back, holding out a glass, and Art half rose to take it from him. "Thank you, sir."

With a wheeze, the bishop settled his bulk in his own leather chair; his own drink he held in a tankard around the outer surface of which some kind of Oriental orgy marched in bas relief. "Mr. Rodney, Rose tells me that you and she have become quite good friends."

"Uh, yes sir, we have." Art's intended sip of bourbon somehow transformed itself into a gulp.

Jamison emerged from his tankard with a trace of beer foam on his dark lips. "She's a lovely girl in her way . . . her mother was a lovely piece, and I oughta know, though I was an old dog even then . . . how was it you two happened to meet? On the tube train coming in from Iowa, wasn't it?"

"That's right, sir." Art drew in a deep breath. "Bishop, I don't mean you or Rose any harm. Far from it. So I'm just going to tell you the truth. I don't know what Rose may have told you, but the fact of the matter is I hardly know her. If she has any, ah, involvement with any man, it's certainly not with me." So far the news was being received with apparent calm. "I'm sorry about her problems, Your Potency, and yours, but I have problems of my own that are just as bad. I'm sorry."

Jamison leaned forward a little.

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"Would you like a refill on that drink?"

"I'll get it myself, sir, thanks. Another beer? I'm telling you the truth, bishop, I never was any good at lying."

The bishop indicated with a headshake that his tankard had no need of refilling as yet. He swiveled his chair to keep facing Art, who was now at the bar. "Some people never realize they're not, and it gets 'em into endless trouble. Most of the time honesty simplifies things, if it doesn't always pay. You really did help Rose, out there in Iowa, didn't you? Her own story is a little muddled. She was just coming back from visiting some girl friend in Dubuque, I guess, when that riot broke out."

"Oh, yes sir, I had the chance to be of help to her in a small way." Back at the sofa, Art sank down with relief and took a sip, this time truly no more than a tiny sip, of the excellent bourbon. "But believe me, there's been nothing wrong between us. We made it all the way, right there in the park, while we were waiting to get on the train to Chicago."

Jamison was nodding slowly. "Arthur, I find myself believing you. I know my own daughter, and she just gave me your name too suddenly and too willingly. I don't suppose you know the name of the man she is involved with, as you put it?" Then before Art could try to answer, the bishop scowled and waved a white-palmed, wrinkled hand. "No, I withdraw the question. Don't want to put an honest man like yourself on the spot."

"I really haven't the faintest idea, anyway, who it could be." Numbly relaxing, Art sipped at his icy whisky. His head ached, but not as bad as before. It seemed that he had managed to avert any new and disastrous trouble; and what more could a man hope for than that?

The bishop set his tankard down carefully on a small table. "Not that I care an awful lot what kind of fun she has with men." His steady black eyes peered at Art from their time-ravaged face. "Probably that shocks you, coming from a churchman like me. But if she wants to sit with some young fella and gaze at the stars and forget all about sex for ten minutes, I can't see how society is harmed."

"Yes sir, I am surprised to hear you talk like that." It would really have shocked Art, too, if he hadn't been somewhat numb with alcohol, and emotionally exhausted by still more shocking things. "If what your statement implies is true, that society isn't harmed by repression, that it doesn't matter what people do with sex, why do we have the Church of Eros then?"

The bishop heaved himself erect, his erotically-decorated tankard in hand, and walked over to the dark fireplace. It looked a lot like George's, except this one was bigger. When the bishop switched it on, a realistic imitation of burning logs, probably a hologram, appeared in the dark cave. The logs crackled audibly and flared and seemed to send smoke up the flue.

"This thing is a fake," Jamison mused, patting the mantle with one hand. "Lots of fire and noise, but no smell. And no real heat." He set his tankard on the mantlepiece and

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turned to Art. "You know why it is good for man to worship sex? Why it really is good? Simply because the poor fool has nothing better before which to prostrate himself. Eros as a god is far from perfect, he's just the best of a bunch of failures."

Having a little time to think over what the bishop said, and looking at the old man closely, Art was not so very surprised after all. There were such cynical bishops in modern fiction sometimes. And Jamison wasn't just old, he must be decades over a hundred. He must have spent his youth in the period of moral vacuum before his Church became established. Art had sometimes heard other very old people express similar startlingly modern and radical views.

Standing massive beside the fireplace, Jamison told him: "The war-god and the wealth-god and the heaven-and-love god all have failed. Heaven-and-love came the closest. Best example is the man they nailed up on the cross. He spoke to a lot of people, that one did. He was about the best, except for sex. And then Allah and Jehovah and Mithra and all the rest.

"And then there's the man-god. You know what I mean by that? I mean god made by man in man's own image, humanity in apotheosis, we will all be god someday and maybe our great leader is god right now—he's the worst, the most dangerous, and we're not through with him yet. Damnation, are we ever through with anything?" Jamison's voice, which had taken on the tones it might employ on Saturday nights in the pulpit above the orgy, fell back to conversational pitch. One other man in Art's recent memory had used such ancient expletives. "Mr. Rodney, man was made to worship something, and no god he finds is worthy of him. That's what the ancients would have called a tragedy. Sex does the least harm, I would judge; and sex is fun. Oh man, yes man, it sure is fun."

The bishop smiled at Art wryly, and made his way to the bar to get a refill on his beer. Then back to his leather chair to let down his weight, he and the chair wheezing together. "The only thing is, if she does like some young man in what to her is such an extra-special way, then I'd like to know his name and what he's like. Rose has had enough pain in her young life already. She tell you about that ape-assault where she lost her eyes?"

"No sir. I didn't know that was what had happened. It must have been terrible."

"That it was," said Jamison shortly. "My much-publicized crusade against the street-apes and the dope-peddlers, which you will hear a lot about if you stay long in Chicago, stems in large part from that assault on my daughter."

"I believe I heard something about it from the police. They were in favor."

"I myself am not a non-violent man," the bishop said. "Not always. Eros does not counsel turning the other cheek except for a caress."

Art failed to understand the reference.

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Jamison sipped at his newly foamy beer: "When I was a boy, a lot of people thought it was having brown skin, what was then called being black, that made young men go out and act like apes. And there was a grain of truth in what they said, a grain of truth, because brown skin could be a real burden then. It could make a man feel desperate and just lash out."

Art grunted something. He was growing sleepy and would have to be careful that he didn't doze off, what with the drink and the hypnotic fire.

"Arthur, if you should ever quote me as saying what I said about stargazing being not so bad after all, I shall of course deny it. Likewise with my speculations on comparative religion. On the other hand, if you should want to mention to me now your own problems that you said were so bad, I can at least guarantee secrecy. Maybe I could even offer help."

Art was abruptly wide awake again. "Well, my problem involves my wife. And the Bureau of Family Planning. It's a rather serious . . ."

Jamison was already shaking his head and putting up a hand to stop him. "No. Not Family Planning trouble, I'm staying clear of that. Sorry, no, it wouldn't do for a man in my position to get involved. Too bad, my boy, but I can only wish you luck."

"That's all right, sir, I understand. And I wish you luck. And Rose. Understand, bishop, I'm not having an affair with her, but she's a very attractive girl and I can understand how a man might wish to do so. I mean that as a compliment."

"Hmf," laughed Jamison, a single laugh, not loud. He was staring into the glow of his artificial fire, and looking into the long scroll of his memories he found Art's words amusing. Then he was silent for a while, and Art was almost dozing again before Jamison asked suddenly: "You're not angry about what Rose did to you today?"

"Telling you I was the man? I almost fell through the floor. She didn't spring it on me until we were here and I couldn't run out. But I'm not angry now. She didn't do it out of meanness."

"You're right about that." Jamison nodded. "There's no meanness in her. But ever since that assault she's been not quite right in her mind. Too much frightened of any least hint of violence. I think she's scared that I'll have violence done upon the real man, should I discover his identity. Now who could he be, that she should harbor that idea?"

"I really wish I could help," said Art. "But I guess there's nothing I can do."

"She saw psychiatrists right after she was injured, and now she's talking about going to another one, but I don't put any faith in 'em. Doctors, computers, modern science, and we still live in caves with the doors blockaded. Not that I want to damn modern science, not me with my artificial heart and arteries." With a seeming effort Jamison roused himself from his musings, and once more got to his feet. "Go with Eros, my son. Is there anything else I might be able to do for you?"

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Art put down his glass and stood up. "I guess not, sir. Thanks again for getting me out of jail. I really was innocent."

When he emerged from the study, Rose, who had changed her red bikni for a transparent dress, jumped up from a sofa in the hall and hurried to him eagerly. "What happened?" she stage-whispered. "Did Daddy believe you?"

"I think he believed everything I told him."

She was so delighted she jiggled up and down like a child. "And he didn't explode?"

"No, he didn't."

Rose squealed. "My faithful protector! You took such a risk for me." She threw her arms around Art and kissed him with a kind of innocent chastity. "Poor Daddy, sometimes at his age his mind wanders. I hate to deceive him. But I knew you'd manage somehow. Oh, how can I thank you?"

"It's all right."

"It isn't all right. You've done so much for me, that now I *must* do something in return." Her voice turned suddenly cool, and she retreated from him half a step. "If I wasn't pledged to be chaste with only one. . ."

"Please, Rose!"

"You're right, what must you think of me?" She tugged Art down the hallway. Looking toward the door to the escalator, he could see that a different bodyguard was now on duty. Rose snuggled one breast against Art lustily. "I'm not promiscuous, you know," she whispered. "Not like some of those bluenose girls, those terrible ones they throw in jail."

"I can tell you're nothing like that."

As they were going down the escalator she said: "I bet they didn't feed you properly in that awful jail. And, knowing my father, he gave you nothing but drink. Let's go out and get something to eat, and we'll talk."

"All right." He had nowhere else to go at present. It was almost four, hours since they had fed him at the midwifer's hideout, and the whisky he had just taken was biting at his empty stomach. "Where shall we go?"

"I know a place. I'm buying."

That seemed no more than fair, and he went along. They were just getting into the car again when Rose squealed, suddenly enough to make Art jump. "Artie, I forgot all about your problem, trying to help your poor wife save her baby! Did you get a chance to mention it to Daddy? What did he say?"

She had the problem backwards, but he saw no point in enlightening her. "I did mention it to your father. He can't do anything."

"Tell *me* more about it."

She sympathized and persisted until he had to elaborate on his story a little. Obviously she had the idea that he was trying to help Rita avoid an abortion, and he let her go on thinking so. Why upset the poor girl for nothing? He would share a meal with her, and maybe some sex again, and go his way and never see her more.

"But where is she right now?" Rose questioned anxiously. By now she had driven the car into a drive-in automat of the better class and they had placed their orders.

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"Here in Chicago . . . really, Rose, it's painful for me to even talk about it. And there's nothing you can do." He reached to take a tray of food from a robotic servitor at the window. When he looked back at Rose she was shaking her head slowly, and smiling as if in mischief.

"Artie, as soon as you've eaten you're coming with me to get some help. I know people Daddy doesn't know!"

XII

ROSE urged him to hurry through the meal, and shortly they were on the road again. "But where are we going?" Art kept asking. "Who is it you want me to see?"

When he began to grow angry, Rose at last stopped being coy. "We're going to visit my psychiatrist, in his office."

"Rose, that's not the kind of help I need. I'm not trying to adjust to my situation, I want out of it."

Rose dismissed such quibbles with a shake of her head. This time she was driving manually instead of riding on autopilot, proceeding slowly and cautiously, with fierce concentration on the job. They were headed straight toward the center of the city.

"It's a good thing Daddy hasn't started having me followed yet."

"Why do you say that?"

No answer.

"Rose, I'm sure you mean well, but I don't see how this is going to help me in the least."

"I know you don't. But wait and see."

Art slumped back in his seat. He could demand to be taken somewhere else, but where? Probably by this time Rita was waiting for him at the Parrs', with a red picnic cooler frosting over at her side, her belly flat and perfect once again. All right, Rita and George and Ann had won. So let them do the wondering and searching for a few hours. Meanwhile, let Rose lead him where she would.

She parked in a public garage on the edge of the no-private-vehicle zone encompassing the city's center, and from there went on with Art by slidewalk into the multilevel knots of moving pedestrian ways that in their plastic shields threaded the deep canyons between the skyscrapers. At about forty stories above ground level they entered an office building, and boarded an elevator which bore them much higher still. From the elevator they walked an elegant, skylighted hallway, to stop at last before a door lettered

RAOUL RIZZO M.D.
D. PSYCH.

Rizzo. Art had somewhere, recently, heard that name. He followed Rose into a doctor's waiting room, small and luxurious but empty. Not even a receptionist. There was an alarmingly remote look on Rose's face, and she put sexless fingers on Art's arm. "Hush. Wait."

After a moment an inner door opened. The well-dressed young man who emerged from it was of no more than middle height, but so emaciated that he looked taller. His eyes did not turn for even a moment to Art, or in any other direction

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away from Rose. "My lady fair," he said, his tense voice hardly louder than a whisper.

"My true knight," Rose breathed in answer. Her expression was becoming even more remote, moment by moment. "Oh, my champion."

They stepped closer to each other. They raised their right hands, and each caressed the air a few centimeters from the other's face. Not once did they make actual physical contact. Staring woodenly over each other's shoulders, they reminded Art of opposing chess pawns set down slightly off-center on their respective squares.

Art just stood there. If they didn't mind his watching, why should he?

At last Rose turned, breaking off the non-embrace. "Raoul, Raoul my cold one, this is Art, the man who helped me on the tube train. You remember my telling you."

"I thought that today I would have you all to myself, Rose, rose petal, rose essence, dear specter of a rose." The psychiatrist sighed, still staring into the air. At last he roused himself and put out a hand to Art. In Art's grasp the thin fingers felt as weak as they looked. Raoul's gaze was penetrating at first but then it kept sliding self-consciously away.

"Raoul, dearest. Today Art was kind enough to help me *again*. Now he has a problem of his own, and we've just got to do something about it for him."

Raoul thought this over for ten or fifteen seconds, nodding slowly. He dug a pipe out of a pocket in his translucent shorts. He looked from Rose to Art and back again. "Come in then, all of you," he invited in his solemn near-whisper. He held open for them the door by which he had come out into the waiting room.

In his inner chamber Raoul pushed a pair of reclining chairs together side by side, and gestured for Rose and Art to seat themselves. Looking out the window as he sat down, Art saw the June sun working its way lower in the northwest sky, beyond a palisade of towers and a groundcover of distant, much lower rooftops.

Raoul perched himself cross-legged on his desk and lit his pipe. Judging by the aroma of the first fumes, the tobacco certainly contained an admixture of something stronger.

"Mr. Rodney." Raoul paused and puffed. "You witnessed the greeting that passed just now between Rose and myself. Have you ever beheld even a brother and sister going to greater extremes of anti-erotism? My purpose in posing the question is not to shock you."

Art, watching the lowering sun and wondering if Rita could also see it, had not been paying close attention. "Are you brother and sister? But I thought . . ."

"No, no, we are not. Perhaps I failed to make my meaning plain. Would you have described our behavior as obscene?"

No, thought Art, just exhibitionistic. He doubted that the greeting would have been quite so extravagantly repressive had there been no audience. But, wanting to be a good fellow, and uncertain whether Raoul wanted to be thought ob-

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scene or not, he answered: "I suppose most people would call it that."

It was Raoul's turn not to listen. "I just wonder," he murmured, as if to himself, "why did I employ that sibling analogy? Brother and sister may repress a mutual sex attraction and the repression is tolerated by society."

"Of course." Art glanced over at Rose, wondering if she still hoped that he would benefit from this visit. Her inscrutable lenses were aimed steadily at Raoul.

Raoul rocked back and forth on his desk and puffed his pipe. "Taking a larger view, are not all men and women in some sense siblings? What then is more natural than our occasional urges to escape from sex? We are all of us subject to the deep powers of the subconscious. Modern science tells us that dreams, produced in the subconscious, are attempts of the ego to flee the restrictions of the body. In every human adult lies the buried wish to return to sexless infancy. In all honesty, isn't letting these urges out into the open the only healthy course to take?"

"I suppose." If Art spoke honestly he would say he thought his healthiest course would be getting up to leave as soon as he could think of someplace to go. Rose meant well, and he didn't want to hurt her feelings, but this was quite ridiculous.

With an unfolding of bony legs Raoul got down, or rather stood up, from his low desk. "Personally, I have never conducted an analysis in which I did not uncover a strong, buried celibacy-wish in the subject. Our differences from other animals are inescapably part of our natures, and we ignore them at our peril."

"You may be right." Now she was going to have the chaste baby anyway and he was not going to be with her when she needed him the most. That was all his campaign to rescue her had accomplished. What had he done? But what else could he have done?

"Face these things in yourself," Raoul was saying, in a brooding voice. Behind him on his walls were abstract photographs, and a couple of Vandalist splash-paintings, up-to-date and arrogant in expensive frames. Yes, the art had been dead for a century, all right. "Face them squarely, and they will begin to lose their power over you."

Art cleared his throat.

Raoul's eyes fastened on his, this time not to be easily driven away. "Face the truth about what has happened between you and Rosamond! When you first saw her she was alone, she was frightened, she was in danger."

"She wasn't exactly alone."

"Immediately you went to her aid. Your relationship thus began with no erotic values, but society tolerates that in an emergency, and you yourselves did not realize that in your hearts you wanted it that way.

"When the immediate danger was past, perhaps you turned to sex? Yes. *Then,* when your lust was temporarily in abeyance, there came the moment of temptation. The forces of the subconscious were no longer to be denied. The fragile remnants of your lust were to be

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sacrificed upon the altar of repression. You wanted to flee with Rose from the world of flesh, to climb a crystal stair to an ethereal palace, to enter the world of sublimation. Yes. Perhaps you draped her body—"

"Enough of this," Art pushed away his suddenly vigorous memories of that sunset with Rose on the bank of a wide river. He tried to get to his feet forcefully but the reclining chair betrayed him and he staggered and had to make an effort to keep from falling. "Look here, I haven't asked you—to analyze me."

Raoul fell silent, gazing at Art with what seemed a mixture of pity and antagonism.

"Dearest?" Rose spoke up timidly. "Raoul? The reason I thought you might be able to help Art is because his wife is looking for a midwifer. Art wants to help her save her baby, but there are obstacles."

Raoul, professionally unshockable, took the news in stride. "I can help him live with the situation, provided he wants to be helped."

Rose shook her head. "No, my chill one, that isn't what I meant."

Raoul blinked. "What, then?"

"Oh, for you to see your father about it, of course!" Rose was lovingly irritated by her lover's obtuseness.

At mention of his father, Raoul's face twitched, and he laughed bitterly. He sat on his desk again and tried to relight his pipe.

"Please, dearest. You mustn't be jealous. Art and I are *not* having an affair. He and I are strongly erotic together, really we are."

Puff and pause. "Why do you say that?"

"Who is his father?" Art asked, standing now with his arms folded.

Rose flowed easily to her feet; probably she had some experience with these chairs. "I say it because *you* are my knight. Do you think I could ever want to sit coldly beside any other man?"

Raoul closed his eyes and let his pipe go out.

Rose hovered near him, pleading. "My champion! Won't you do this little thing for me? Take Art to see your father?"

"Who is his father?"

Raoul's eyes opened. His whisper had a broken sound. "For you, my lady, my chaste one, I will do it. Sometime tomorrow."

"Tomorrow might be too late for his poor wife. Couldn't you do it now?"

"I thought that you and I would have this evening alone together."

"Please. Take Art to your father now. I set you this task, to prove that you revere me."

"Then I have no choice but to obey." Raoul came to life and slid off the desk. "Will you wait for me here, my lady?"

Rose squirmed as if with repressed desire and took a step back, avoiding any possible physical contact with her knight. "I'll wait here all night for you, if need be. When you come back, maybe . . . we'll play chess."

"My lady, not that childish game, I beg of you. Anything else."

"Who is your father?" Art asked the ceiling. "And what good is seeing him supposed to do me?" Like as not Rizzo Sr. would turn out to

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be the head of Chicago's branch of the Family Planning office. Soon everyone in the city would know about Rita's warped reproductive cravings and her illegal plans. No one would do anything to save her, but everyone would know, even irredeemable idiots who thought chess was a childish game.

After staring incredulously at Art for a moment, Raoul asked: "You don't know who my father is?" And then he laughed bitterly and long.

STILL not knowing, Art went along with Raoul, first in a taxi to a garage, and then in Raoul's car. In spite of all, a nagging hope persisted.

Whatever his occupation might be, Rizzo Sr. had evidently made a success of it. The blockhouse in which he lived was every bit as high-walled and luxurious as the Jamisons'. The Rizzo garage space was even larger than the archbishop's had been, and protected by heavier gates. As Raoul eased his fine car to a stop and turned its turbines off, Art was once more nagged by the sense of having recently heard the Rizzo name in some other connection. Was it something about this very structure, Rizzo's townhouse?

In a short passage connecting the garage with an underground level of the Rizzo home, a pair of nonuniformed guards were stationed. They looked meaner than the Jamisons' Jove, though neither of them was quite as large.

"Who's your pal, Doc?" one of them asked.

"A man I know." Young Rizzo smiled wryly. "A man with a problem, I expect my father will be able to help him, if he wants to help."

"Maybe you shoulda just phoned," said the other guard. "The Magnifico's sorta been lying low the past few days."

The what? thought Art.

"You know how my father likes to do business face to face."

The pair of gate-blockers looked doubtfully at Art. He could place them now. They were the ones who had sat on him in the brothel. Not the same men, but the type. Rizzo, Rizzo, he almost had it.

"Well, let's see if you're carryin' anything. Doc, the boss is in his study now, if you wanna go up."

"I'll be back in a minute, Rodney," said Raoul, and went on ahead. The two guards began to pat Art's pockets and bulges, searching him. Rizzo. Little old Alfie in the slumburb tavern, saying Vic Rizzo's townhouse was bombed. Oh, great stargazing quadruplets.

Rizzo Jr. was soon back from his filial visit. His face was flushed, but seemingly not with joy. "He says I can bring him up."

"Awright."

Art rode up with Raoul in a large and fancily paneled elevator, which disgorged them into a room like the entry hall of a small art museum. Marble columns supported a high, vaulted ceiling, and across one end of the room there burbled a complex of waterfalls and fountains and pools, complete with fish. For all its size the hall was almost crowded with paintings and statuary. On the wall opposite the elevator, in a place of dominance

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over the other objects d'art, was an ancient life-sized crucifix of wood, done in a realistically gory Spanish style. Its paint, once red and brown, had aged into a grayish dullness that with the cracks and holes gave the figure a look of frighteningly patient endurance.

Raoul led Art across the museum hall and opened a massive wooden door. "In here," he ordered tersely.

The room behind the door was also quite large, with a beamed ceiling and woodpaneled walls. Might it all be real, virgin, tree-segment wood? Anyone whose house had fountains and waterfalls—

Art caught one breath-tripping glimpse of a girl, heavily garmented, even her face veiled, before she moved out of sight behind some opaque woven draperies. And there, almost as startling as the girl and the paneled walls, was a huge genuine fireplace that appeared to be consuming genuine logs.

At least four chess sets, of stone or wood or metal, all large and ornately carved, were visible on tables or in display cases. A suit of armor stood at Art's right hand. What appeared to be medieval torches standing in brackets on the walls bore warm and writhing electric flames. Upon one paneled wall there hung a crossed pair of long, pointed weapons, pikes or lances of some kind; on the opposite wall a brace of submachine guns were mounted in the same way. Walls and furniture bore many framed photographs evidently reproduced from twentieth century newspapers or films, showing men in the obscenely heavy garb of that time. The men smiled unpleasantly and many of them were carrying firearms. From the upper walls there looked down at least a dozen paintings of a more distant time, mostly of men in archaic costume wearing swords and accompanied by crouching dogs. These paintings looked old and dim enough to be originals. The Magnifico, the guard had said.

The Magnifico came forward amid his treasures. His small torso was plump beneath his shimmering, partially translucent dressing gown, but his face still showed some of the leanness of his son's.

His flat voice came out around a cigar. "So, you're the man with troubles. I was curious to see you, I wondered what kinda man my son would bring here to get his troubles fixed."

Art made himself look straight into the Magnifico's direct and seldom-blinking eyes. The reality of power before him was as apparent as the hardness of the suit of armor at his right. Art could feel the world and all its probabilities shifting again, crazily and unpredictably beneath his feet.

Art cleared his throat. "My trouble is a fairly simple one."

"So. I guess my son can only fix the high-priced troubles in his office. The simple ones he still has to bring to me. What's yours?"

"My wife is in a birth-mill, here in Chicago." Facing the reality of power in Rizzo's eyes, Art had a moment of weakness, of indecision. But now his choice was clear-cut, inescapable. "I want to stop her from going through with it."

"So, who says I know anything about birth-mills?"

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THE fireplace roared and seemed to make the room too hot. Somewhere behind Art, Raoul fidgeted. Art said the next thing that came into his head: "I see you're a chessplayer." Every time he glanced around the crowded room he spotted another set somewhere.

Rizzo removed his cigar from his mouth and raised his eyebrows. "You play?"

Art smiled faintly. "I'm a master."

"No! You are?" The cigar went flipping into the fireplace. Rizzo almost bowed. "Come in here—whazza name? Mr. Rodney? You come in here, there's somethin' I want you t' look at."

He held open for Art the drapes behind which the veiled girl had vanished. At the same time he raised his eyes to stare coldly over Art's shoulder. "Hey Raoul, go fix yourself a drink or something. Or get out. Hey, if you see Penny around maybe she'll wanna screw. She's been sublimatin' her urges quite a bit lately."

The only answer was the sound of the heavy wooden door softly closing; probably, Art thought, it could not be slammed. He went on through the drapes and Rizzo followed, into a smaller adjunct of the study. The girl was not in sight.

"You say you're a rated master, Mr. Rodney?"

"Yes. However not in this state. In California."

"I'd appreciate it if you'd take a look at this position I got set up here. Tell me what you think about it."

On a board on an antique table were ebony and ivory men arranged in an intricate early middle game or late opening position. At first glance Art took it for one of the new computer-discovered variations of the neo-Shapiro defense, but one of White's knights was oddly placed, changing the whole complexion of the game.

"Interesting," said Art. It really was. "One of your games?"

"Nah, not a real game. Oh, Mr. Rodney, meet Penny."

The veiled girl had returned from somewhere amid velvet hangings, moving on soft silent feet. Under the Magnifico's smiling but watchful eye, Art kissed Penny hello with a fervent show of lust, and pushed a fondling hand inside the innermost of her voluminous garments.

Rizzo chuckled benevolently. "Nov run along, little lady."

Penny paused to blow an open-mouthed kiss to Art before she let the drapes fall into place behind her.

Rizzo, staring at the place where she had vanished, released a small sigh. "That son of mine just don't know how to keep a woman." Then he brightened. "That reminds me. You hear the one about this traveling salesgirl, she stops at a lamasery to sell blankets?"

"I'm not sure."

Evidently he was not going to hear it now. Rizzo was still looking after the girl. "That Penny, though. She's been livin' with me here almost a year now, and I've never touched her. Imagine." He sighed again. "I hardly seen a centimeter of her skin in all that time. I did see her ankle once, when she was walkin' upstairs, and I nearly

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went dizzy. I tell you, when I finally get rid of that girl she'll prob'ly take a lot of loot along, but she's been worth it, everything a man could want. Whaddya think about this opening setup, now?"

"Interesting." With some relief Art turned back to the board.

"Y'see, I'm foolin' around with a little analysis here. I like to take the book theory, you know, and try t' find improvements in it. The fellas who write them chess books sometimes don't know much about the practical side of the game. Chastity, I'd like t' get out and play in some tournaments. But I got too much business to think about." Rizzo glanced up from the board. "I'm a investment counselor."

"I see. I was hoping to play in a big tournament myself, but then this trouble came up involving my wife. That makes it very hard to concentrate on chess."

"Oh, yeah. She's in some birth-mill, you said. Tell me about that."

Art recited his story. By now he had it down pat, like some politician's standard speech, that could be edited a little here and there to suit the day's audience even as it was being delivered. "Possibly it's too late and the operation's already over. But if at all possible I want to stop her from going through with it. For her own good."

"And you say you talked to this doctor who's gonna do it, but you don't know his name?"

"Right. He's one of these Christian priests, I know that much. Tall fellow, kind of narrow-shouldered, with a sandy beard."

Rizzo nodded thoughtfully and started to pace the room. For the time being chess was forgotten. He lit a fresh cigar and squinted through the smoke of it, studying Art's face.

"Whatever people she's paid, or promised to pay, can have their money," said Art, as free with George's substance as with his own. "But my idea is this: the pregnancy can just be terminated legally, and as far as my wife will know, something just went wrong. The fetus turned out not to be viable, or whatever the medical term is. That's simple, and there's no trouble in it for anyone."

Rizzo smiled faintly. "I kinda taken a liking to you, Mr. Rodney. Course you understand I don't know nothin' about midwifers—but what did you say your wife's name is, what does she look like?"

Art told him, and ran through the standard speech again, going into greater detail. His tongue stumbled reluctantly at times. He felt afraid to start hoping again.

Rizzo heard him out, then nodded decisively. "Yeah, I see. Too bad. Any day now she's gonna have the operation, huh?"

"I got the impression it might be at any hour."

"Uh-huh. Some of these priests don't stick to religion, they're real cultists and mix into things where they don't belong. Excuse me a minute, I got a phone call to make. Look over this position here meanwhile, hey? Tell me how do you like White's chances."

LEFT alone, Art heaved a tremendous silent sigh. He sat down at the chess table and leaned his head forward into his hands, letting

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his eyes close. A great exhaustion was coming down upon him. It came with a disturbing sense of permanence, as if he might never be able to rest long enough to recover. But his feelings didn't matter, if Rita could be saved. Someday he would be able to tell her what he had done, and someday she would understand and thank him for it.

Art opened his eyes and found the chessmen waiting. Rizzo would expect a masterly evaluation of the position, and that was little enough for him to ask.

Four or five minutes of Art's flawed attention sufficed to convince him that the Rizzo Variation was a bust. Rizzo evidently thought that White's advanced knight could not be readily dislodged from its fine post, but Rizzo had overlooked a thing or two, and White was going to have to retreat and waste a tempo, and stand poorly in the middle game. These were the facts, but they had better be conveyed diplomatically.

In a few minutes the Magnifico was back. His mood had brightened into something like joviality. "Like I said, I know nothin' about any birth-mills. Still, I got a hunch that things are gonna work out okay from your point of view. Just a feeling. Well, should we have a little game? How about a drink, somethin' to eat?"

"Certainly." Art got off another sigh, like a man dropping a weight. But there was the weight still clinging to his shoulders.

He began to rearrange the chessmen to begin a game. Someday she would understand.

XIII

LYING CHASTELY beside Marjorie in the dark bed between their darkened hotel rooms, Fred was pouring out his heart.

"Ah, who'm I kidding, I'm not ready for even a brown belt yet. I could be, if I settled down and worked at it. I dunno, though, if it's really worth the effort. All the lumps and bruises, and you never get rich. Karate just gets you flunky jobs, like this part-time bodyguard thing I got going now with this Dr. Hammad. Ivor, he's the regular bodyguard, says the pay never amounts to much.

"George does all right, though, running his own dojo. He must, you should see his house. I don't know what he charges for private lessons. If I could only get myself a setup someplace like he's got. And his brother-in-law does all right too. Ann, that's my sister, says Art holds down an electronics job *and* wins prizes. He must have bread comin' out of his ears. He wins his prizes playing chess, real good at it I guess.

"You know something I was good at, though, besides karate, was woodcarving. I won a couple prizes when I was a kid. My folks showed off the trophies, but they never paid any attention to the stuff I carved. Finally I didn't carve any more. Maybe if I'd kept up with that I could set myself up handcarving chess sets. Art would probably give me some clues on what sizes and shapes the players like and where to sell them. You know, I carved a nice religious cross once for Ann, when she got baptized. I

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did it from pictures in books. That was after she left home and married George. She still has it on the wall in her kids' room. George don't go for that religious stuff himself, but he don't care what Ann does."

Fred raised himself on one elbow in the bed, making his plastic gladrag cloak crackle faintly all around him. Marjorie's form, similarly draped, lay still and straight beside him. The room was too dark for him to read her face but still he could perceive the tenseness of her body. A tinny, tiny sound, so faint that he could hear it only intermittently, leaked out into the room from the earplugs of her pocket hifi. Fred could not make out any of the words but he thought it was Orlando, one of the season's top recording stars, reciting his own verse. Marj had said she liked to have Orlando on for background music whenever she got started outward to the stars.

"Anyway," Fred went on, "the carving business is not bad in some ways if you can get a reputation as an artist, but there are certain drawbacks. You have to have the right wood. And when you go to sell your work, it's hard to prove it's really handcarved unless they've actually seen you do it. I mean there are woodworking machines that can be set to take off little irregular chips and leave little marks just like a hand knife, and the machines do the job a hundred times faster. It's like man in the modern world has to contend with machines at every turn, you know what I mean?"

Majorie was nodding, nodding gently. She could understand, she could understand it all and heal him of the pain of it. Above Orlando's tinny moans Fred now could hear another little moan, but in his girl's warm breathing voice. Could it be that she was weeping for him. He reached to chastely touch her hand, and tried to think of words to tell her how much it meant to him to have her here tonight.

MARJORIE's little moan swelled quickly into an exasperated snarl. She sat up in her crackling cloak, and with the hand he had touched she reached up to pull her earplugs out. "You twin!" she stage-whispered angrily at Fred. "What's the matter with you? I've run into some horny stallions in my time, but . . . what do you think I am, your shrink? If you can't talk it chill any better than you do, just fall back in your plastic and let me listen to someone who can." She flopped her head back on the pillow and turned up the volume on the hifi slightly.

Into the silence, Orlando's peculiar, almost metallic voice recited:

. . . up on gladrag hilll
you left me so chilll . . .

Fred almost hit her. Why didn't he? Only because he was afraid she wouldn't be hurt by his blows at all, wouldn't cry out or fold up or bleed, but would just ignore his efforts the way his dream-opponents usually did.

Hands shaking with the urge to hit, he got up slowly on his own side of the bed, and pulled the stiff opaque plastic poncho off over his head and threw it down. He turned

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away from the bed and pulled his clothes on and went on out of the room without once looking back.

Outside the sky was darkening and the streetlights coming on. In the Megiddo Coffee House Fred spotted Lewandowski and the Wolf sitting at a table together, teetering restlessly in their chairs. Making sure that his own face was hard, he walked to their table amid the baby-crying music that at least was not Orlando's, and amid the smoke, and saw their faces harden, challenging and welcoming him.

"Let's go cruise, men," he said, standing beside their table. Wolf's pelt turned to look at him, with the movement of Wolf's own head and shoulders turning, and the two sets of teeth showed Fred their grins.

"Quads and quints, I'm with ya," said Lewandowski, stretching to his feet. "I been sitting here five hours now, let's go find some live fun."

They cruised out of the Megiddo and right away Wolf began talking about how to organize a street gang and establish a territory of streets and blocks. Fred heard without listening, without caring. As they passed some parking meters Fred tried to smash one with a kick, but it was too strongly built and he only hurt his foot. He thought he managed to keep the pain in his foot from showing in his face, as he was still managing to keep a lot of other things from showing, but it was all coming to a head.

They cruised the narrower, dimmer slidewalks. "Hey," Lewandowski whispered, stopping the other two, "here comes fun."

It was a young couple walking alone. They slowed timidly as they drew near, but that only made their fate a certainty. Fred and Wolf and Lewandowski crowded them right off the walk onto the well-manicured grass.

"You're a jobholder, ain't you, pal?" asked Fred, slapping the young man. The youth began to wrestle ineffectually, and Fred slammed a fist into his ribs full power. The young man collapsed, croaking. Fred bent down and seized one of his manicured fingers and wrenched it back savagely until he thought it must be broken. "Now try and work," he said.

The young man sat on the ground yelping and stuttering with his broken finger and cracked ribs. Fred had had enough, so instead of shutting him up he walked away. After a quick glance around to make sure that no one was coming to interfere, he looked to see what Wolf and Lewandowski were doing with the girl.

"Don't hurt me!" she was squealing. "Take my money, wrap me, but don't hurt me!"

"Who'd want to wrap you, sister?" Lewandowski laughed. He had her purse tucked under his arm, and he was tearing off her electrostatically-clinging costume, while Wolf kept her from running away. Lewandowski peeled the last bit of silvery film from her plump body, and then shoved her away so she fell, sadly naked and unattractive. She sat there quivering flabbily, staring at them in abject terror, while Wolf and Lewandowski rifled her purse.

Some people at the end of the block were looking their way and

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pointing. "Come on, let's go," urged Fred, starting away.

Wolf delayed a moment, bending over the girl. She screamed loudly and he jumped up and came hurrying after Fred and Lewandowski. For some reason the three of them started running. They ran for a block, switched slidewalks athletically, and ran again, looking over their shoulders. There was no pursuit, and they slowed to a casual walk. Fat Lewandowski was puffing hard.

Wolf was holding up the head of his pelt, waiting for the other two to notice it. Fred saw that the sharp-pointed plastic teeth were reddened. "I left m' brand on her, where it counts," Wolf snickered, and Fred wondered, without caring, where the place that counted was.

Lewandowski still had a handful of silvery film, and was tearing it into little bits which he scattered like confetti. Good-humoredly he demanded: "How much bread that guy have on him, Lohmann? Hey Fred, you get the bread?"

Lewandowski laughed at his own rhyme, and they all laughed, feeling good. Fred's sense of power and self-assertion, brought to a peak by the terror with which the girl had looked at him, was not spoiled by the realization that he had forgotten to take the young man's money.

"Naw, I didn't get it," he admitted cheerfully. "But what th' purity."

"Didn't get it? Why?" Lewandowski too was more amused than upset.

"'Cause I didn't give a quint about it. What the purity!" But now the omission did begin to bother Fred a little, mainly because the young jobholder would be comforted by having retained his money and his papers. All right, next time Fred would make up for the oversight. Fred had never done anything quite like this before. As a kid he had been in fights, but never launched such an unprovoked attack. But already he knew that there would be a next time, and then he wouldn't stop with just breaking a finger and maybe cracking a rib or two. Next time? Quintuplets, yes, there would be one.

THE Magnifico, when he finally returned, furrowed his brow over the chessboard and took half an hour to make twelve moves. Then Art managed to let him win a pawn. Rizzo was an intense and serious player, with a drivingly aggressive style that would probably win him most of the amateur games he played. Though he mentioned vaguely having taken part in some tournaments, he seemed to have little competitive experience since he accepted a pawn from a master without apparent suspicion. Maybe he had played in prison somewhere. Art, headache-ridden, wished he had given away a knight or bishop and so provided himself with an excuse to resign. But no, that might be putting it on too thick. The best thing was to arrange a draw. If only Rizzo would not take so long to move!

A man opened the study door. "Chief?"

Rizzo grunted in exasperation, got up, and went out. Art shifted in his chair, took a bite from the

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tasteless sandwich that had been provided for him, took a sip from the accompanying drink, and looked at his watch. Nine o'clock, almost. It would be dark outside. His headache was waxing fat. He could ask for aspirin but it wouldn't mix well with the drink.

He meant to spend a lot of time and effort, from now on, making it up to Rita for what she was losing, or thought that she was losing. Right now, for some reason, all of Rita's weak points—mostly insignificant things, of course, like her occasional stutter—kept popping up in Art's thoughts; but all in all she was a good wife. What was he thinking? She was a purity of a good wife, the best of wives, and someday she would understand. When that day came it would be a great relief to be able to tell her how he had managed things, and to have her understand and thank him for it. It wasn't as if he had had a real child of hers done away with. It wasn't anything at all like that, even if they could move. They would smile over all this then. Over all their foolish ideas and fears.

Someday they would. Still only nine o'clock. Yes, his watch was still running. Twins, how this night seemed to last and last.

The Magnifico came back through the draperies, smiling and rubbing his hands together, looking eagerly at the board. "Where'd you move? Like I said, I don't know about these places where they have your wife. But if I was to give you advice like a father I'd say don't worry, these things have a way of working themselves out."

"I moved my queen here. And I want to thank you."

"For advice?" Rizzo's laugh was deep and rich, and still it managed to be nasty. "Advice is cheap."

The door opened again. "Chief?"

"Oh, Gramma's chastity. Look, Mr. Rodney, you don't mind, hey? I guess we can't continue our game tonight."

"Of course." Art stood up, trying to hide his relief. "Some other time maybe. We'll call this one a draw."

"Sure, sure, maybe another day. Look, I'm gonna have one of my friends see you safely on your way."

A taciturn man nearly as big as Jove came out to guide Art on the slidewalks and ride with him; maybe Rizzo's cars were all out on business. The guardian rode silently and protectively at Art's side until they drew near the Parrs'. Art didn't want him coming to the door. "It's all right, you can go back now. This is a safe neighborhood."

He rode on under the black sky and the daylight streetlights that somehow were nothing like the day at all. What would he tell George and Ann when he got back to them? Nothing. Why should he have to tell them anything? Never mind, some words would come.

He looked sharply over both shoulders; his escort was well out of sight already, and there was no one else in view. He glided past a clock in a vendor's window, and checked it automatically against his watch. Only a little after nine; why did he bother to worry about the time? If only this headache would let up.

At an intersection he heard loud voices in the dark, coming from

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along the walk that came to cross his at right angles. A streetlight must be out, it was so dark in that direction. He saw an arm wave, though, an extended imperious hand, and a voice called: "Hey. Hey you, hold up." At least he thought those were the words.

Art ran. Each jog of his body sent a stab of pain flaring up from the base of his skull to exit on his pate. The voice, or voices, were raised now in a babble of threats and pursuing feet came pounding in his wake.

He tried to yell for help, but only the tortured wheezing sounds of an exhausted runner left his mouth. The wall of gray faintness, that he had last seen following his struggle in the whorehouse, rose up quite soon to mask the world.

Art stumbled, and had the sensation of losing consciousness for just a moment as he fell. Were they kicking him, hitting him already? No, it was only the pain in his head and the indirect jarring as he fell to elbows and knees on the smooth and smoothly moving walk. Where were his attackers, then?

With a grateful shudder he realized that there was no one nearby. They had left him for more sporting game. Or had he really managed to outrun them all?

Rizzo sent them, Rizzo sent them, said the irrational panic inside his buzzing head, but that made no sense at all. Rizzo liked him, and anyway Rizzo's agent would not have been so easily eluded. But still Art could not get rid of Rizzo's name. It kept coming up like something that had to be vomited.

Art glimpsed a street sign and knew that he was still on the correct walk. He tried to get up on his feet again but couldn't, not right away. He rode on all fours, in terror of meeting someone.

THE guard at the pedestrian entrance of the Parrs' blockhouse took no chances on being tricked out of his bulletproof booth. First he shut the steel grillwork gate behind Art's crawling figure, then got on the house phone, and only then came out of his booth to try to help.

A few moments later George came running up, his face a taut mask. Once they helped Art to his feet, he was able to stand. The faintness returned for a moment but then abated swiftly, although the headache pain went on and on.

They asked him where he had been hurt, and which way his attackers went. These days if you saw a human being knocked down, squashed like a bug beneath a runver box in the road, you just assumed some other human being had done it to him.

"I—I got away from them somehow. I'm just winded. From running."

George said to the guard: "I wouldn't call the cops yet, hey Casey?"

"All right, no law says I have to in a case like this. Wouldn't do any good anyway."

"I'm all right," Art muttered, finding he could do without support as he and George passed on into the interior of the block. "How are the kids?"

"Okay. Come on in and rest,

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Art. You look like you've been through the mill." At the Parrs' patio door, Ann came to meet them. "Put that thing down," said George. "We're not invaded."

"Ohh," she murmured, sagging briefly against a wall. Art saw now that she was carrying a carving knife with a gaily decorated blade in her right hand, holding it as if ready to thrust. For a moment he could also see in her face all the strain of the last few days, and he could see how she would look when she was middle-aged and when she was old. Then she turned away to take the knife back to the kitchen.

George pulled forward a chair in which Art gratefully sank down. Then George said: "We've just now had word from Rita's doctor. The one who operated. She's all right."

"Operated?" Art started to his feet again. "Then—?"

"Sit down. She's all right. I got the code-word message on when and where to pick up her and the baby."

Suddenly this was all, in essence, very familiar. Old stuff. It had happened to him twice before, with Timmy and with Paula. "How's the baby?"

"Oh, the birth went okay. Code-word for a healthy boy." George bent down, squinting at Art, his face going all blurry in Art's vision. "You all right?"

"I'm all right," said Art. "All right now." He was crying.

XIV

TONIGHT Dr. Matthew Hammad was working late office hours, and he happened to be performing an abortion on a teenaged girl when the phone call came in.

"Says to tell you it's life or death," his receptionist informed him. "Really vehement about it." Behind the receptionist's image on the intercom he could see on the wall of his outer office, just some grapes and Bacchus' elbow showing in part of a painting visible there.

"What name?" Hammad asked, looking across the supine figure of his abortion patient. He was irritated at the interruption and yet professionally unwilling to ignore the possibility that the life-or-death claim was true.

"Said he was calling for a Ms. Chester. But I didn't know that you had any patient by that name."

"Oh." Hammad glanced down. The young girl draped in translucent sheeting on the treatment table had the music earphones on, and the look in her eyes was far-away. "All right, I'll take it in here." He touched the girl on the arm and when she had loosened an earphone and looked up inquiringly, he said: "We'll just let this work for a minute. Are you comfortable?" Resting on the table between her raised knees, the Autobort looked something like a small vacuum cleaner, or some unearthly alien in sexual union with the girl, its slender sterile organ of plastic and flexible glass extended into her body.

She said: "I'm starting to get a cramp inside."

"Well, next time come in sooner, and we can do a simple menstrual regulation. Those are a lot easier, you know. Next time don't wait until you're this far along."

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The girl, pouting at the mild lecture, put her earphone on snugly again and Hammad went over to the phoneplate. He punched the button to take the incoming call. "Ms. Chester" was a code word, and one that Hammad knew he had better not ignore.

The caller kept his own phoneplate blanked, as Hammad expected, but the doctor recognized the voice from a few previous calls. What the voice said this time was guarded and indirect, and the message was being relayed from someone else, but still the message came through plainly.

"Yes, yes, I understand." Now Hammad was frowning. "Well, it wasn't my intention to make trouble when I made the referral. Mrs. ah, Chester's whereabouts are not known to me now with any certainty." Now Hammad understood why this call was being made; every time overlords of illegal business had the chance, they tried to embarrass the operations of their rivals in midwifery, the religious cultists who ran their birth-mills without paying tribute for the privilege.

"I can only guess whether I'll be able to reach her and, ah, provide the therapy." Even while he was engaged in this difficult call, Hammad kept a conscientious physician's eye on the progress the Autobort was making. The girl was now quite relaxed, soothed by light sedation and music and the mild sexual stimulation of the machine. Through the tubing into the receptacle of clear glass on the vacuum cleaner's back there now flowed the debris from the dismemberment within the womb. Now a few ribs, fishbone clear and soft but recognizable to the trained eye. Now a knee joint, which Hammad also could readily identify. Now parts of the skull and brain.

"Yes, I understand." His frown deepened as he stood listening to the phoneplate voice. Certain powerful people, those who made it possible for him to continue in the illegal sideline of his profession, were displeased that he still made referrals to the cultists. "Yes, I'm sorry." Try to help out a friend whose sister was having problems and look where it got you. Now which would he rather have angry at him, George Parr or Vic Rizzo? There was always South America, he thought to himself. Meanwhile, George Parr need never know everything that went on, while Vic Rizzo evidently already did.

"All right, then, I'll do everything I can. At once. You can depend on me to take care of it."

His caller blanked off. Looking grimmer than ever, Hammad kept the phoneplate in hand and punched a number rapidly. Waiting, he continued to keep a dutiful watch on his tabled patient. She was coming along nicely. "Hello, let me speak to Ivor. This is Dr. Hammad. Oh. Well, whenever he comes back, or as soon as you can reach him, will you tell him to call me back at once. It's rather urgent. Thank you." He blanked off and at once began to punch again.

WHEN Fred got back to the Y and found the message waiting for him at the desk, he wasted no time in hurrying to Hammad's

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office; he wanted to hang onto his job, part-time or not.

Hammad ushered him directly into an inner consultation room and shut the door. "Lohmann, there's something very important that's just come up, and I haven't been able to get hold of Ivor. It can't wait. You haven't been working for me very long, but I think I can rely on you—right?"

Fred nodded at once, and felt the butterflies start up in his stomach. His big chance—could this be it?

"Fred, the situation is this. There's a fetal specimen that has to be reclaimed. This woman—she's not one of my patients. I'm doing this for a colleague—has carried off a specimen that according to law should have been destroyed, and she's likely to get several innocent people in trouble by doing so."

Fred nodded.

"There'll be a nice bonus for you if you can carry this off. We'd prefer that the police not be involved in this at all, if you understand me."

"Yeah, I got the idea."

"Good. Now, from past experience with the people who have been encouraging this woman to do the wrong thing, I can tell you just where she's likely to be waiting to be picked up by some of her relatives or friends. It's down on South Shore beach. Do you have a reliable friend or two to take along in case of trouble?"

"Yeah, sure." With any luck at all he would be able to find Lewandowski or Wolf, or both of them, back at the Megiddo. Lewandowski, being a native Chicagoan, would certainly be able to lead him to South Shore beach, and either of them would be a good back-up man if he should need one. "I can handle it for you, chief. If she's there and she's got it with her. Don't worry about a thing."

ART and George had time for only a few hours' sleep before they started out on the slidewalks at about an hour before dawn. When Ann came to wake him, Art sat up with a start, but he felt rested. The pain was still there in the top of his head, but not bad enough to keep him from concentrating on other matters.

George had dug out a couple of old fishing poles and some other fishing gear for them to carry, to provide a plausible reason for being out if they fell under the eye of the police. He said a lot of fishermen went to the lake in the early morning, this time of year. They briefly considered calling a cab for the trip, but with cabdrivers required to file complete reports on all passengers for the police computers, that was about as risky as being stopped and questioned.

On their southwest passage through the city's nearly deserted predawn streets, they twice underwent brief surveillance from police cars but were not stopped. They also had one near-brush with a small group of rough-looking youths, but at the last moment the others avoided open confrontation.

In the grayness before sunrise the slidewalks brought them to the edge of a green strip of parkland that George said ran continuously along the city's lakefront. Streets and buildings behind them now, George led the way into the park,

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across a wide, grassy athletic field, now otherwise deserted. Art thought he could smell the lake nearby, fresh dampness without the tang of ocean salt, and billows of morning fog drifted into their faces as they trudged toward the east. The fog made vague green mounds out of stands of trees, and limited visibility drastically in all directions.

"Looks like nobody's following us," George muttered, after he had glanced over his shoulder several times. Traffic on the street they had just left was so light as to be practically non-existent, and at the moment nothing was moving there. The ghosts of fog stalked in from the lake to cut them off from the city behind, and when he looked to the east Art could not see nothing but fog. Now in that direction he could hear a couple of distant radios or recorders blaring out pop music.

"We should see some people soon," George told him in a low voice. "There are always fishermen. She won't just be sitting out here utterly isolated."

"I was wondering." He kept wondering too if she would really have the picnic cooler with her. According to George the code message had indicated that she would. Rose had carried her own fetus home—or somewhere—but that had been under emergency conditions. Maybe illegal parturition was always an emergency situation. Maybe normal birth and life were, too.

Out of the thick fog there loomed abruptly athwart their path a chest-high wall of massive stones, looking at first sight like part of some ancient fortification. Art realized in a moment that just beyond this rampart was the lake. They came up to the seawall and stopped. Four or five more tiers of the gigantic blocks made a rough stair going down to the water, where waves materialized out of fog to lap against their base. It was impossible to see out over the water for more than a few meters.

"This chaste fog," George muttered. He checked his watch. "She's supposed to be waiting right around here somewhere. Look, we'd better separate. You go south and I'll go north, along the rocks. If you find her, give a whistle. If you need help, yell out good and loud and keep on yelling, I'll be there as fast as I can."

"How far south do I go?"

George considered. "I'd say half a kilometer or less and you'll come to a harbor where a lot of private boats are tied up. Some fishermen will be around there too." The radio music was coming from that direction. "If you don't find her between here and the harbor, better turn and come back this way. I'll go north about the same distance and come back. If we can't find her we'll meet again about here."

"Right."

FRED and Wolf came out of the park to stand beside the seawall amid the drifting billows of fog. There they paused uncertainly. At the moment there was no thin blond girl carrying a container—or anyone else—in sight.

Fred wished he had been able to

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find Lewandowski, too, but there was no use wishing. He said: "This must be the place. I guess we better split up. How about if you go that way and I go this?"

"All right." Wolf and his neckpiece showed their double grin. "Watch out, man. They say there's a lot of apes hang out in these parks."

Fred laughed nervously, and with a tentative wave of his hand set off toward the south, walking parallel to the seawall. Wolf watched him go. Almost at once he was swallowed by the fog.

Wolf set out at a deliberate pace in the opposite direction. Despite having been up all night, he felt alert and cheerful. It was fun to have something interesting to do with his time, fun to help out a pal, and there might be some money at the end of it. He didn't know what the whole thing was all about, except it had something to do with illegal midwifing, but he didn't really care.

He knew the moment he saw the girl that she was the one they were looking for. She was a few meters inland from the seawall, waiting amid some carelessly stacked stones left over from its construction. Thin and blond, and doing nothing but waiting, she was sitting on the lowest tier of one of the stacks of stone where she was pretty well sheltered from view. And there was what he had been told to look for—a container of some kind, which turned out to be a white-handled red picnic cooler.

Her head swung around sharply when she heard the tiny scrape of his sandal on the stone he had mounted in order to see down into her sheltered spot, and at the sight of him she gave a little cry and started to get up. She was wearing a translucent skirt and open Cretan bodice.

Wolf grinned his knowledge at her and came hopping down the stair of stone to where she was. Conscious of being menacing, he watched her face, enjoying the little series of masks she was trying on, masks of unconcern, of welcome, of defiance, trying to hide the fear inside and keep him off.

He came right up to the girl and reached out, but not for her. He put his hand instead on the handle of the cooler. Maybe she would be smart and simply let him take it and walk away. But no, when he turned around she jumped at him silently from behind, and he smiled a little because he had been half expecting it.

But the attack on his face and head was too fierce for him to go on smiling. He had to drop the cooler and use both hands to shove her off. She went down on the grass with a little cry of pain. "Wait!" she called down. "Wait, can't we talk about this?"

Wolf could feel the blood trickling down his face from where her nails had raked him. He sighed. This was business, and Fred hadn't passed along any instructions that the woman was to be beaten up. People who hired this kind of business done usually spelled out just what they wanted, no more, no less. Anyway, Wolf had gotten all the urge to hurt people out of his system during the night. He shook his head, mocking and chiding.

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"Lady, lady. You know this thing don't belong to you anyway." He picked up the cooler again, noticing its unusual weight. And cold. Well, he wasn't being paid to be curious.

She got up, pulling her bodice together, hiding her breasts provocatively. "Please," she called, first quietly, then louder. "Please, it *is* mine. Isn't there something you want more?"

Wolf gave a tiny laugh and turned, shaking his head. She wasn't bad, but this was hardly the time or place. He started off again, the heavy cooler pulling at his arm.

To his utter amazement, she jumped him from behind again, this time screaming as she landed. This time the attack almost brought him down because it was so unexpected. He dropped the picnic cooler on the grass again, once more fended off the clawing fingers from his eyes, and twisted around to get a good grip on the girl's arms. Without much difficulty he avoided her clumsy attempt to knee him in the balls. This time he gave her a violent shake or two before he let her fly. This time she went down harder and lay there sobbing. "Lady, you're pushin' your luck."

Then there was the sound of running feet approaching. A little guy carrying a fishing pole and tackle box dashed out of the fog and into the little arena among the stones, where he came to a sudden stop. A short guy with blond hair and goatee who looked enough like the girl to be her brother. Wolf had fifteen kilos on him easily. He picked up the cooler once more and took a step in the way he wanted to go, scowling, but the little guy only threw down his fishing gear and took a step to stay in front of him.

"Hey, it's a quin-tup-let," Wolf said easily. "And this one must be the runt of the litter." Now here came another pair of running feet, and he reached into an inner pocket for his knife, but it was all right after all, it was just going to be a little extra fun, for it was Lohmann who came charging up.

Lohmann slid to a stop, though, with a look on his face so sick that Wolf had very rarely seen the like before. "George, Rita," said Lohmann, staring at the other two people there, and speaking in this low, sick voice. "Oh purity. Oh chastity no."

"George," said the girl in a low, fainting voice. "It's my baby. Stop him."

Wolf snarled and held out the knife to make sure little George stayed where he was, and here he came anyway with a skip and a dart. Wolf, good with the knife, aimed at the oncoming flat belly. The body before him twisted away, though, going down very low, and Wolf never saw the upthrusting back-kick coming, only felt his breath driven out of him and his heart stop momentarily as the kick smashed into his ribs and broke them inward. And then he felt his knee with his weight on it break sideways from some terrible impact, with blinding pain, and then he felt a jolt that went all through his head and tore part of the world away and came again and again like a long echo, until the world was gone.

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Art Rodney, puffing and lumbering toward the sounds, saw Fred backing out of the arena among the huge stones.

"George, I didn't know,". Fred was saying. "George, I swear." And then Fred turned and ran, just ran flat out, almost knocking Art down in his passage. Art could still hear the long strides pounding when Fred had vanished into the fog.

Advancing again, Art took in the scene with a glance. Knife on the grass, man on the grass, George looming over him, looking down and rubbing his knuckles automatically. White-handled red picnic cooler on its side, Rita sitting near it, sitting awkwardly and in pain.

"Oh, darling, easy," she said into his ear. "Don't squeeze me. Oh Art, you didn't bring the police down on us, did you? The doctor said you wanted me still."

"Oh, yes, yes, yes I want you. Never mind about all the rest of it. Let's get you home."

"My baby." She was pointing at the cooler and he went to set it right side up, as if that could make any difference to what was encapsulated inside. Then he looked over at George, who was prodding the fallen figure with a toe. "What happened?" Art asked. "I got here as fast as I could when I heard a commotion. I thought I just saw Ann's brother Fred run past me just now."

"It was." George shook his head and seemed to rouse himself. "Let's get out of here."

"And who's that?" Art moved a little closer to look at the man on the ground. The man's eyes were open, blankly, above what looked like a fur collar of some sort. His face was scratched and marked with trickles of fresh blood. "Will he be all right if we just leave him?"

"He'll be dead," said George, in a voice that wavered once and came back strong again. "He's dead right now. Let's get going." And he moved and picked up the cooler with one strong hand and helped Rita to her feet with the other. "Art, get our fishpoles and stuff."

"Oh. Oh, chastity." Art looked once more at the dead man and pulled his eyes away. Somehow he picked up all the fishing gear that he and George had carried here and dropped, and then went on after his wife and her brother into the fog. When he caught up, he demanded: "Rita, did that fellow back there hurt you?"

"No, no, only pushed me down. And my bottom is still sore from the parturition, and I have cramps, but the doctor didn't have to make any incisions. I can walk, but I'm so tired I don't know how far." Now she was clinging to Art's arm while George walked a little ahead of them carrying the cooler. They moved through the fog toward the sound of Orlando's voice on several radios.

"Art, George, if anything happens to me, this is the situation. He's on the waiting list for a womb, but it may be months. The doctor says the safest place for him in the meantime is the Loyola School of Medicine, cryogenics lab. They seem to have some safe depository. I don't know where. Loyola's on the north side of the city, Art. Ask for

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Gwen or Larry. I said we'd get him there. The doctor said he was afraid he had to flee the city right away or be arrested. Maybe there are worse things than that for us to fear. That man back there was no policeman, but he was after my baby, not after me."

Art felt a pang. Rizzo. He patted his wife, hugged her, murmured soothing words.

"I tell you he was. He would have taken this basket and walked away if George hadn't stopped him."

Art, head throbbing sickly now, stared at George's back, moving three paces ahead of him through the mist. Over his shoulder George said: "We'll deliver him where you said, Sis. Hey, what's his name?" Art stared at the red cooler, seeing instead the dead body they had left behind them on the grass. He and George both.

"I haven't talked that over with his Daddy yet. I think George Arthur. Or maybe Arthur George, though Art used to say he didn't want a junior."

They came abruptly to a little rise, and at its top encountered the seawall again. Almost below them, amid thinning drifts of fog, several long piers extended at right angles to the shore. The piers were edged in places with moored pleasure boats and elsewhere occupied by fisherfolk with their poles and nets and buckets. The sun was up now, turning fiercely white above the watery horizon, visible between great lake-borne mounds of the dissipating fog.

Here a road of recycled plastic gravel ran just inland from the seawall. A few fishermen's cars were parked along its edge. As the three of them reached the road, they simultaneously saw a police car cruising in the middle distance, a face turned out of its window in their direction. In unison they altered course, and there was another car approaching along the road where it bent inland.

"Split up," said George succinctly. He thrust the picnic cooler into Art's hands and with the same movement took back his own old tackle box. "Rita, take the bait jug," he added, and in the next instant was gone, sprinting toward the south. Now both police cars were accelerating, but the trio on which they had been closing in were gone three ways at once.

GEORGE went around a clump of bushes, and back onto the seawall, where he dashed past a group of fishermen. Then he slowed to a trot, and then to a quick walk. He looked back frequently, and cursed. Obviously neither of the cars had come after him, though he was staying near the road to lure them on. But now at last there came a uniformed policeman in pursuit of him on foot.

"You there, halt!"

George was purposely deaf to the first yell, figuring they would give at least one more before they started shooting. If they were serious enough to shoot, which they probably weren't as yet because the dead man could hardly have been found and reported to them so soon.

He heeded the second, closer shout, and looked around with

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polite surprise as an athletic policeman of dark brown skin came running up.

"All right, hands in the air."

"What's the matter, officer?" He set the tackle box down and put his foot on it and raised his hands.

He was patted down for weapons. "What've you got in there?"

"Show me a search warrant and you can search me completely."

"I'm conducting a weapons search, mister, get your foot off that thing before I shoot it off."

George got, moving two steps away and keeping his hands up. The policeman peered into the box and then looked at him expressionlessly. "All right, come along. Bring this box of junk if you want it."

The officer sheathed his pistol and took a good grip on George's right sleeve just above the elbow with his left hand. With this grip he walked George north again. It must be a technique they taught at the police academy, how to be ready to subdue resistance by the suspect. The grip was not bullying, and yet quite firm enough for business. Not bad for an amateur, not bad.

Fishermen stared at them as they passed. Now only one police car was in sight, parked, with a scattering of the curious observing it from a little distance. Rita sat alone and composed in the back seat while a man in civvies sat twisted around to face her from the front.

"Do you know this man?"

Her eyes turned neutrally to George, waiting for a signal.

"Of course she knows me, I'm her brother."

"George, this gentleman says he's Detective Simmons."

"What were you running off with, George? Empty tackle box, maybe? Don't you know it's against the law the interfere with police carrying out their duties?"

It wasn't really empty, but too close to empty to be convincing to a fisherman. George held it under his arm and remained silent. The man sighed and informed him that he was under arrest for conspiracy to violate the Population Control laws, and made the little speech detailing his constitutional rights.

With George and a patrolman in the back, and another uniformed man up front with Detective Simmons, the car began to move, cruising slowly north, going off the plastic road and over grass, following the lakefront. Then they turned and cruised the other way again, and stopped and let out one of the uniformed men, who stood looking over the piers with quick twistings of his head, then walked away, talking on a wrist-radio.

The man in civvies turned once more. "We're bringing along your tackle box and your empty bait-bucket, George and Rita, to show the judge what kind of tricks you try to pull. We're also going to bring that red picnic cooler and the fat man who's carrying it. We're going to pick that up in a minute. Why don't you tell me something about it now, just to show you're willing to cooperate? Where were you taking it?"

"My sister and I want to see an attorney before we answer any more questions at all. This sounds like something serious."

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"What do you think something serious is, George? What were you two and your sister's husband doing here today? No reason you can't tell me, if it wasn't anything wrong."

"Let us talk to an attorney," Rita said. "And then we'll answer questions."

A message was coming in on the car radio. DOA found on the rocks near South Shore Beach. Police number-jargon followed. The two policemen still with the car exchanged looks but did no more. George held his hands down so that the callus pads might not be seen. Sooner or later somebody might make the connection. At the moment he felt no guilt or fear; at the moment he was still steady as a rock. Attorney, attorney, where will I find you? He had a couple of them among his students, but none in criminal law.

Another radio message was coming, this one on Simmons' wrist-radio. From the back seat George couldn't quite make the message out, but abruptly the car was rolling again. It accelerated strongly, turned on its siren for a blast or two, then almost at once screeched rocking to a halt. "That's Hall," Simmons in the front seat said, opening his door and getting out.

Out of a small crowd a lean, stooped man was coming toward them, plodding with slow weariness as if he waded through mud; that was not pure figure-of-speech, George saw, for the man was wet as if he had just fallen into the lake. From the business socks inside his sandals a little puddle sloshed out at every step, and water plastered down his thinning hair and dripped from his translucent shorts and jacket. Simmons jumped to meet him, asking excited questions.

"That fat fathering breeder!" was all Hall said at first, in a voice choked with anger, as he stood there trying to press the water out of his clothes. "That quintuplet-siring crowder!" Some of the onlookers gathered at a little distance smiled or giggled at the earnest vileness of the man's speech, while one or two appeared sincerely shocked.

Simmons was holding his wrist-radio ready. "If he shoved you in the water I can put in a call and charge assault and resisting arrest. That'll get us some more manpower out here. Which way did he go?"

"I don't know. Anyway, I don't care to press those charges." It seemed that a little strong language had served to discharge Hall's anger. He put up a hand as if to ward off the detective's glare and exclamations of disgust. "He didn't hurt me. I don't think he even intended to knock me in the water, just to get away." Hall had taken off his jacket and now began to wave it like a distress signal, trying to dry it in the morning breeze. "I called out to him, when I saw that I had him cornered on a moored boat, I said just hand over the specimen and save yourself a lot of trouble. You and your wife and the whole world will be better off, I said. But then he came off the boat

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with this picnic cooler under his arm like a football. Just put down his head and charged, and he must weigh ninety kilos . . ."

Hall had looked at Rita several times, but had offered her no recognition until now. "Well, Mrs. Rodney, I suppose you and your husband and brother here are getting yourselves a lawyer. From the way you sit there looking so serenely into space, I suppose too that you've heard about the report."

Rita, chin high, was studying the horizon. George asked: "Report?"

"The new population forecast from the UN. The one we've all been afraid of. A real surprise. If the latest trends continue, world population is going to reach a peak of around ten billion in the next forty years and then start down, maybe even a rather sharp decline. Not that that will help the people who are going to go hungry in the next forty years, of course, but it's going to make it a little harder to convict people like yourselves before a jury." Mr. Hall was now standing nude and shivering slightly in the dawn, wringing out his shorts, his dripping codpiece slung over one shoulder.

"World population's going down?" said the detective, sounding rather dumb. He couldn't seem to grasp it right away. George couldn't either.

Hall said: "Oh, we all knew it had to happen someday, one way or another. The only question was how and when. Still, when it does happen, we feel surprise."

Simmons was busy with his radio. George asked: "But what is it? The Homo Leagues? I know they're growing fast."

"They were allowed for in previous forecasts. No, the thing that tipped the balance, that wasn't foreseen, was all this religious celibacy. Half a dozen religions booming today, young people pulling themselves out of the reproductive pool by the tens of millions. People will think it will ease the population pressure right away, though of course it won't. It was hard enough before to get convictions, with bleeding-heart lawyers and frozen fetuses to cloud the issue. Now this. But we're going to try, sir, we're going to try. I'll see you in court, whether we manage to recover the specimen or not."

George, riding north along the Outer Drive in the back of the police car, going to some police station where they would have to let him see a lawyer before he said a sublimatin' thing, held his sister's hand and looked out over the lake. The waves were coming in stronger now with a freshening breeze, starting to crest into whitecaps near the shore. The fog had gone. Get through, Art, get through. Loyola School of Medicine, cryogenics lab, ask for Gwen or Larry. I've killed a man to save that kid, and you'd better not lose him now. I'd kill any other son of a bitch who tried to kill my nephew.

He smiled a little for the new man born so strangely into the world, and at the same time he was very worried. The waves came in from the clear horizon, cresting into white. The crest of the wave has been reached. And now, to see which way the world slides down. ✱

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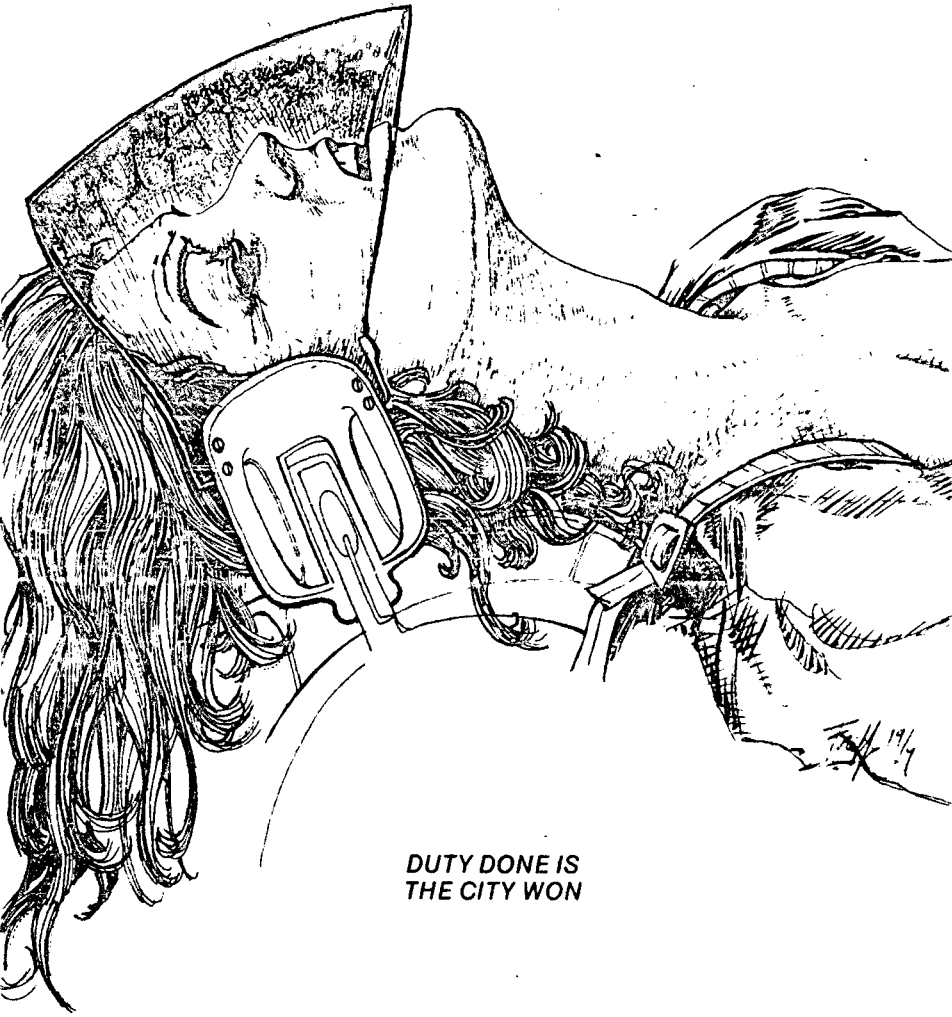

DUTY DONE IS
THE CITY WON

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Hell is underground.

Five minutes ago they'd never seen each other. Two minutes ago the little blonde had been clutching Karmela for dear life. Now she tacked unsteadily down the subterranean hall in the grip of a husky matron. Karmela let throat-tightening sympathy distract her own churning fear as she followed them, jostled and crowded by other women. Someone was chivvying them from the rear—surely no one was *that* anxious to serve the City.

Cindy looks like a rowboat hustled by a powerful tug.

Trinity! Why'd I think that? I've never seen the ocean. Must have been some travelogue: York, maybe, or Socal. Somewhere big and dangerous and frightening.

HOLY TRINITY PROTECT ME
DUTY DONE IS THE CITY WON
SELF MUST SACRIFICE TO THE NEEDS OF ALL
I CAN DO ALL THINGS IN THEM THAT STRENGTHEN ME
THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR BUT FEAR ITSELF

Ever since she'd received Notification—less than an hour ago—slogans had become Karmela's only coherent consciousness. Then, on the elevator, Cindy's trembling arms had gone around her waist, and the reassurance she'd automatically given had steadied the other. But still she burned with resentment: snatched from job, family, comfort, sequestered with thirty-nine others, forced into unnatural servitude to involuntary compliance—and she couldn't even bear it alone, she had to spend herself comforting that weak snit of a girl.

I always collect the weepers. Every time I turn around someone's using my shoulder.

The corridor, patchily lit, stretched close and green and strangling. Another sign like the one in the elevator, flashing imperatively: REJECT PERVERSION. In the elevator car it made sense, where mixed contact was both close and unavoidable, but why here? Karmela decided someone must have a sick sense of humor.

Around a bend in the tunnel: DUTY DONE IS THE CITY WON.

Well, at least that makes sense.

The matron lumbered off, leaving Cindy bonelessly trembling in the doorway of a stifling locker-room. She sagged toward Karmela, goldpiled hair catching in the silver filagree at Karmela's throat.

Swearing under her breath, Karmela carefully untangled them. She would be wearing her good bola today, her lucky piece. She laughed, shortly, bitterly; the room stifled sound.

There isn't enough air down here to go around.

Echoingly garbled instructions blatted from a loudspeaker; Karmela held her breath, straining to hear. It stopped, and everyone gasped and shuffled; someone sobbed and choked.

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Karmela still gripped her bola. Slowly she pulled it over her head, caressing the satiny stone with her thumb.

If they lose this . . .

Anger gave her strength; she joined the line for a basket, still hiding it in her fist. Sweat poured down her face, between her breasts, ran chill over the flatness of her stomach to dampen her crotch. She felt isolated in the crowd, bearing alone the whole burden of Contract. Someone would take over her job, and she's spend a whole month trying to straighten out the mess, as she always had to after vacation. She glanced toward Cindy, motioned her to join the line; it looked as if she'd spend the whole Service time taking care of her. As if she didn't have enough to put up with.

Always something, she thought resentfully. If she couldn't rely on Celia at home, she'd never have been able to keep their troy, the most difficult yet most rewarding family group. Mari didn't have what it takes. Celia was their strength, but she, Karmela, was the lubricant that kept them functioning smoothly.

Will they miss me?

Cindy was still sagging beside the bench when Karmela returned and set her basket on it. Roughly she pushed the girl toward the line.

"Get a basket, Cindy!"

The vague blue eyes snapped into focus, and big tears spilled over invisibly fair lashes.

"Basket? What for? Oh, Karmela, I'm so scared!"

"Basket for your clothes." Soothingly, appealing to childish pride: "You don't want to lose that pretty dress."

Cindy moved off. Karmela rubbed her bola nervously. Having it no longer strengthened her; she wondered desperately how to keep it safe. The mesh of the basket was too wide to hide it. Finally she pushed it into one of her roughout desert boots and stuffed her panties over it, then neatly folded her ruffled shirt and tailored navy slax on top, latched the cover, and returned to the line to have it locked, thumbprinted, and stored.

Wish I didn't know how often nice things turn up missing.

The line moved sluggishly past the lockers, into another corridor. Stillness was heavy; occasional bitter comments were subdued, pounded down by the air and the stink of fear. Sudden shrieks spun them all around; still clothed, Cindy struggled with the matron who had pulled her off the elevator. Furiously Karmela broke out of line and strode back.

"C'mon, honey," the matron chattered, "c'mon, honey." Her voice was loud, mechanical; she knew Cindy wasn't listening, but it didn't matter. She could enforce compliance. "You know the Contract."

"Why me? Why? I don't want to! I won't!"

"I'll take care of her!" Karmela drew Cindy's hot, swollen face against her breasts.

"You know the Contract binds all Cities; we can't violate it for personal preference," the matron said defensively, taking the clothes Karmela stripped off Cindy and folding them deftly into a basket.

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"Preference!" Karmela made the word a curse. "*You* know that insisting on biological function discriminates against us."

"Population quotas limit the others, and they call that discrimination, too."

"We have to fill the quota, and they have to limit. 'Keep order and maintain the population,'" Karmela quoted.

"They didn't think we could maintain ourselves, but we do!" The matron's heavy cheeks flushed patchily. "Praise the Perfect Troy!"

"So we do," Karmela said bitterly, joining the end of the line with Cindy once again clutching her. "We even keep our elderly, instead of sending them to Havens; we take in immigrant converts. And thank God we still get them; otherwise I'd have been down here long before this, and often." She was talking to herself; Cindy had withdrawn again into a shocked daze. "Look at the men, poor things, the ones that can have to Serve over and over; too many are nonfunctional. Look up, Cindy! We women have always been biologically superior." She gave the girl a little shake and an encouraging grin.

"I wish I hadn't worn my bola today." What subject would capture Cindy's attention? "They don't very often lose things, but if anything gets lost, I'll bet that'll be it. It was the first really perfect cab I ever cut."

"I noticed it," Cindy hiccupped. "Did you really make it yourself?"

"Did it all myself: found the rough, slabbed it, shaped and polished it, too. Bought the finding, of course, but I'm pretty proud of the whole thing. It's fortification-agate, and I got the design balanced and the polish is flawless, and it fits the bezel perfectly. You should have seen how many cabs I ruined before that one, though!"

"It's simply lovely. I wish I could do something like that." Cindy's voice had steadied, Karmela noticed. So had hers. And the child was standing on her own two feet for a change. Karmela slipped her arm protectively around the slender waist.

"My troymate's a rockhound; I picked it up from her. At first I didn't think it would be much fun, hours on the desert hunting well-disguised rocks and days slicing them up and working them, but it is. Even hard work's fun, when you get something like that out of it."

"You're in a troy?" Cindy's tone was worshipful. "Gee!"

"Three years."

"I'm in a crowd. But I only left school six months ago."

"They Notified you young, then."

"Well, at least I won't have to worry about it any more."

"True. I've been sweating out Notice for years; it will be sort of a relief to have it over."

They were half-shouting over squawks of protest and the solid roar of water.

"I hate showers," Cindy squealed. "They could at least ask if we're clean or not."

"They assume the worst."

THE shower was pleasantly warm, and breathtakingly, punishingly powerful. Karmela

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staggered through and was blown dry. A matron measured her with an expert eye, produced and smoothly fitted a binder before Karmela realized what she was doing. The heavy cloth strapped her arms above the elbow, crossed under her breasts and fastened snugly in back; she could, with difficulty, touch her chin. She glanced back at Cindy.

What a bra that makes!

Cindy stared back at her, flushing, and warmth flooded Karmela. Slowly the younger girl approached and offered her hand; closecoupled they walked the few yards to join the others, milling about a large room.

REJECT PERVERSION, the pale-green wall blinked. BE YE PERFECT. DUTY DONE IS THE CITY WON.

"Will we be here long?"

"Two weeks, at least," Karmela snapped. Then, more calmly, she went on, "Don't be afraid. They take good care of us."

"I suppose so."

"I know they do. I work here."

"You work *down here?*"

"No, silly, upstairs in Hospital. I keep records. I know all about it; after all, where do you think we'll be, nine months from now? It's a natural process. Almost no one dies."

"I know *that.* What I meant was, are they going to make us wait long? I hate waiting."

Chairs clustered in comfortable groups, but no one sat down. They all felt the need to move about, to demonstrate, for a short while, their independence.

Defiantly Karmela stalked to the largest, most deeply cushioned chair and dropped into it. No one would see how badly her nerves were jumping.

"What are we waiting for?" Cindy persisted, perching on the chair arm.

"Who knows?"

"Trinity keep us, I don't think I can stand much more of this," another woman gasped, slipping into the chair next to them.

"Maybe they're going to give us a pep talk," Karmela guessed.

"More likely they're rounding up the men, poor things," the woman said sadly. "They even recruit from Ambiville, now."

Cindy shuddered and sagged toward Karmela. Foiled by the binder in her instinctive warding gesture, Karmela sank a shoulder into the pliant ribs.

"Sit up and behave yourself! Why not use ambis? All of this is unnatural. Who cares how low we stoop? As long as it gets the job done."

"That's the way to look at it," the woman said steadily. "And some of the ambis were normal, once. I know one or two the City destroyed, right here."

"How could that happen?" Cindy gasped.

"They check your reactions, afterwards," the woman replied, nodding dourly at the sign that flashed REJECT PERVERSION. "Down here, that's good advice."

A SICK, creeping chill overcame Karmela's disgust and anger. Aberrant reaction! The most feared perversion of all, the desire to reject perfection, to change their Way of Life. It could overcome even the

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strong, she knew, could cause lovely, sensible people to become confused, miserable failures—ambis, or worse. The City protected itself by rejection of such unassimilable trash, of course—but she'd never dreamed that fulfilling Contract could cause perversion!

Not her! Others, perhaps, but not her! Not strong, cool, competent Karmela! Seeking comfort, she rested her flushed cheek against Cindy's cool flesh even as the girl leaned forward, intent on the other woman's casual words.

"That's why all the admonitions?"

"The whole City is undergoing a religious revival. Well, perhaps that isn't the word; our tradition wasn't ever religious. Not like some Cities, that were founded on fanaticism. I think myself we're afraid this third generation is losing the spirit of the Founders. They knew all about hardship and persecution. They were jailed, fined, fired, ostracized; we have it easy. Why, breeding is the only difficult thing the City ever demands of us. We don't even have to endure the dangerous, crowded conditions of the Old Cities. Our population stays level, we have a good balance of trade, good education, good nutrition, artistic opportunities, the whole Good Life. So of course Complex is afraid we may go soft, especially toward Perversion. Nothing could destroy the City as fast as that! And if a good crusade is the answer, I'm all for it."

"Oh, you must be in Complex!"

"Sort of." She dismissed Cindy's openmouthed awe.

"Karmela's in a troy," Cindy volunteered eagerly, anxious to impress the woman.

Karmela felt vague disgust wrestle with jealousy. To be publicly used to impress an official, and by a girl she'd carried all afternoon, who had leaned on her, excited her, almost promised her . . .

"A religious?" The woman nodded sagely, and rose; a matron was signalling them. "You're proud of it, too. It's not an easy group to maintain."

"You get I am," Karmela grunted, working her way heavily out of the chair. Without free use of her arms it was unexpectedly difficult.

The woman was gone. Had she been making fun of her? Of course the Troy was the traditional model of family perfection; the Trinity, first perfect troy, was Biblically ancient. Just showing off to impress

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Cindy, she decided. The child didn't know any better.

Karmela followed a matron into a cubicle and hitched herself onto the Y-shaped table.

"Lie down, dearie."

"I know what to do."

The matron's speech was set, a reply went unnoticed. "It's no different from a physical, dearie. Just relax."

"Oh, yeah?"

Someone's crying. Maybe it's me.

"Put your legs up, dearie. Head down. Just let me fasten the straps; that's a good girl, safe and snug. Hold real still, now, this won't hurt a bit. Just a neutral bath, make everything nice for the little visitor, and a good greasing up to help it along."

Ugh.

The polarizing mask snapped over her head; she looked up darkly as the man entered. His mask, oriented ninety degrees from hers, made a black hole of his face.

At least he's young. Good wide shoulders, not too hairy, stomach under control and omigod he's big.

He surged against her, bound arms frictioning her spread thighs while the matron adjusted the table to attack height.

I thought I'd have some time . . . while he . . . got ready . . .

Panic tore her when the matron left; she bit down a wail.

IN omigod and UP I'll split and IN and UP and there isn't any more IN to go. Get UP a rhythm you idiot . . . that's more like it. Come on, come on, what's the matter with you? Hands clenched teeth clenched maybe he's clenched too.

This is frightful. Suppose I don't conceive, I'll have to do this again next month.

I want to go home! I want to love with Celia and Mari and pretend this is all a bad dream. I'd like to pretend it now, but this is . . . too real . . .

Suppose I do conceive. Nine months of grossness and misery . . . but I won't ever have to do this again. At least I won't have to take care of the brat . . . I'd be a lousy mother. I want back to my own computerminal, put my files straight, handle bitter complaining patients and impatient doctors and problems I know I can solve.

Explosion at last . . . pumping heat, panting, lax, betraying weakness. She opened her eyes, saw only the ubiquitous, smirking matron.

"Can I get up now? Why not?" Angry almost to tears: "Dammit, can't they swim uphill?"

"Why, dearie, did you think that was all? One breeding doesn't deliver a satisfactory statistical return. Two a day through your fertile period, and we guarantee 82% conception. Just rest, now, dearie."

Karmela shivered with fear, more than the abuse or chill. The woman looked so knowing, so sadistically expectant. Could she be an ambi? Was she the one who would test her responses, when this was over?

Trinity! Don't let me be different! Don't twist my mind!

DUTY DONE IS THE CITY WON
REJECT PERVERSION
BE YE PERFECT

YOU CAN'T MAKE ME LIKE THIS! ★

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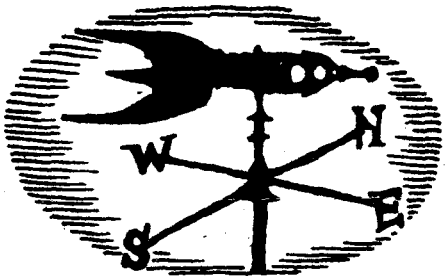

DIRECTIONS

Dear Directions:

I wish to differentiate and analyze some of the many comments made by Poul Anderson in the August 1974 article titled "A Cyclical Theory of Science Fiction." I do not agree with Anderson that the "new wave never existed." Because an author can't tell the difference between one thing and another doesn't mean that "it never existed." This is inane (even though I do agree with Anderson on other points). Many who wish to theorize over the new wave have labeled it anything from "plotlessly precise mechanical trash," to the change, or if you will, acceleration in science fiction as an entirely new concept in reading. As a matter of fact, Anderson himself stated approximately one year ago as saying that the new wave was "an introduction to the more advanced mainstream techniques." At that concept, one suspects that one dozen authors ended up on his back screaming the new wave was again something else. One conclusionally thinks that it's just as ludicrous to label "new wave sf," as it is "sf" itself (even though I agree with Heinlein that sf is 'realistic fiction'). Is it not as easy to label science fiction and fantasy "speculative fiction?" Hell knows you can't say it never existed.

Craig J. Hill
220 Standish #1
Redwood City, CA 94063

Dear Mr. Baen:

I've read a lot about John W. Campbell in the past, and Frederik Pohl, and others, but as of a few months ago I decided you belong right on up there with them. So far.

Dick Geis and Jerry Pournelle are fantastic. The stories are fantastic. Ted Sturgeon and Lester del Rey are fantastic. The Showcase is a nice addition. Anything left out is fantastic. And when the magazine is fantastic so is the editor.

I've read the letters that say how awful science fiction has become and to a certain extent I agree. But I do know that *Galaxy* and *IF* are the two best magazines on the market.

As to that "so far" I put in the first paragraph, that's just to remind you to keep on working hard. But somehow I feel you don't need to be reminded.

Oh, one more thing: I'd like to encourage everybody to subscribe to *Locus*. I'm sending in my subscription as soon as I finish this letter.

Yours devoutly,
John Kelly
4215 Bushton Court
Clarkston, Ga. 30021

This letter is directed to Jerry Pournelle's column "Our Friends the Arabs" in the August issue. Jerry's reply follows the letter.

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Dear Mr. Baen:

Regarding the article "A Step Farther Out," by Jerry Pournelle.

Mr. Pournelle covered the energy situations well, and his article was very interesting, but while he mentions it in passing, he and all other knowledgable people in this field keep overlooking the most obvious source, except in a casual way, and one that we have right now and have had for a number of years. That's solar panels, not in space, but right here on earth.

I am not an engineer and my terminology may be wrong, but I am talking about the little silicon wafers that are arranged in banks and change direct sunlight into electrical energy. The Bell Telephone Company has been using them for years in rural areas where electricity was not available.

A few thousand acres of desert land in Southwest Arizona, as an example, could supply half of the country with power with absolutely no pollution. The only problem I know of is that of storage, since these panels would only produce power while the sun's rays are striking them. If the technology doesn't exist at present to store vast amounts of electrical energy, then I suggest a concentrated effort of our engineers and scientists to produce a means of storage. Think of it, the vast wastelands of the Earth, producing *all* the power needs of the complete Earth, without a single generator, nuclear power plant, use of coal and oil, all free, except for the building of solar panels and the means of storage of that power. And as for "depleting" our source, as in oil and coal, how long is our sun going to last?

Sincerely,
Ed Woods
Box 209
Pearce, Arizona 85625

Dear Mr. Woods,

Jim Baen of *Galaxy* has been kind enough to forward your letter.

At the Mexico City meeting of the AAAS last year, there was a panel and presentation on direct solar energy, and I have some data on the system. If you are interested, by the way, the Congressman from Arizona inserts most articles on the subject into the Congressional Record, a good place to go for preliminary research on practically anything; the Extensions of Remarks usually reprint the best news articles from all magazines (along with an extraordinary amount of gubbage).

There are two problems: at the moment, there's not enough for a full article on the subject, as it's an incomplete story—a Arizona University project seems to expect a breakthrough pretty soon, though, and when that happens *Galaxy* will be among the first to know.

Secondly, you've put your finger on one of the biggest problems, namely storage. I discussed this briefly in one of my articles. The most efficient storage system we have at the moment is pumped reservoir storage, and the Sierra Club, among others frowns on these. Batteries are impractical. Using sunlight to electrolyse hydrogen is another possibility, but this requires both sunlight and lots of water in the same location—and the latter commodity is hard to

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come by in deserts where cloud cover is not a problem.

An electricity supply must be reliable, meaning that the net as a whole must be; a lot of unreliable sources together can add up to a reliable one, but you need predictability, or else a very rapid substitution cycling time, else come disasters.

The efficiency of present day solar panels is rather low. There are improvements expected; also, methods for using diffuse sunlight, that is, methods that would work on a cloudy day, are also in the works.

We'll have a report on all of this when there's a bit more to report; also, perhaps we've worked the energy crisis for about as much material as it deserves just now.

By the way, one of the final problems—not unique to solar direct energy, but certainly a major one for it—is transmission of energy. A lot gets lost sending it over long distances.

In other words, it's the total system efficiency that counts, and of course economic factors are crucial as well.

One of these days, though, I make no doubt we'll make more use of solar energy collected on the ground.

Thanks for your letter, and I hope you continue to like the column.

Sincerely,
Jerry Pournelle

Dear Jim,

Several months ago, T-K Graphics ran a full-page ad in *Galaxy*, and one of the orders received was from Mr. Charles Hillestad, who paid for a copy of *SF: Today and Tomorrow*. In the course of our normal order processing, orders, checks and envelopes are separated. Mr. Hillestad's order did not contain his address, but by the time we noticed this his envelope had been thrown out and his check deposited, so we had no way of finding it. And there has been no subsequent inquiry or complaint. This, then, seems our only method of reaching the gentleman. Will Mr. Hillestad please send us his address so that we can send him the book we owe him.

I hope you can manage to find space for this in *Directions*. Thank you for your kindness.

Sincerely,
Ted Pauls, for
T-K GRAPHICS

Dear Mr. Baen:

My story, *If Ever I Should Leave You*, was published in the February 1974 issue of *IF*. But the version of my story which appeared there had been massively edited and rewritten. I feel I must protest against such treatment. The editing done on it, in almost every case in which I compared it to the original story, was to its detriment.

I realize that you were not the editor of the magazine when this occurred, but writers must object publicly when such editing is done without their knowledge and consent. A writer's name is his or her stock in trade. If I am to stand or fall by what is published under that name, let it be by my own words and not those of a nameless collaborator. I must therefore dis-

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associate myself from this story as it was published in *IF*.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to state my grievance in print.

Very truly yours,
Pamela Sargent
Box 586
Johnson City, New York 13790

Ms. Sargent has the right of it.

Dear *Galaxy*:

In a letter, I somewhat "overdramatized" a piece of fiction entitled *Come Times' Arrow* which, at that time, was a spaceship infested opera, bearing a marked resemblance to a NASA Tech Brief, and expressed a desire to submit it to you for a "look-see." I was preparing the nth draft, blundering through page after page, wondering if I would ever finish, and really hoping there was more to deep-space exploration than free radicals and interstellar grains when I received my copy of the June 1974 *Galaxy*.

The idea that the future is synonymous with the present is not a new one, but I have never seen it presented in such exciting terms as those given by Alexei and Cory Panshin in *Farewell to Yesterday's Tomorrow*. Many editors have written blurbs such as "this is '*now*' science-fiction" to accompany stories; the latest being a drug-oriented pinball soap opera, loosely based on THE WHO'S shatterock experience *Tommy*, in one of your competitors. But, stories such as this, although clearly identifying themselves as being "different," tend to produce the proverbial "bull in the china-shop" syndrome, when presented with material that cannot quite complement their action. In a word, *synergy*.

I think this is what Alexei has in mind when he discusses the "new" sf magazine in his letter to *Directions, Galaxy* July 1974. Although he confines his statements to the "physical" package for the most part, he does indicate the need for "internal" change as well. Again we have combined action. The obvious question is: What type of sf will this new era produce? On page nine of the *Forum* article the Panshins' write, "This universe will be the ideal *reflection* of the new *multiplex* Earth we are now awakening to." I have underlined what I consider to be the key words of this passage. Will mankind see his own past, present (and future?) reflections in other faces on other worlds? Will sf become more *cerebral?* Certainly, both are distinct possibilities, but I would substitute the word *probing* for cerebral. And what of this term, multiplex? This is given in the form of *synergy, ecology,* and *evolution.* I personally feel that these three "Panshin Multiples" will become the by-words of the new era, the blueprints for tomorrow, if you will. I also feel that the new sf will, if you will pardon the expression, come "down-to-earth" in reflective qualities, of course.

Continued success with your new look, and thanks for a *really great* article.

Respectfully,
Jeffrey T. Davis
45 Lake Street
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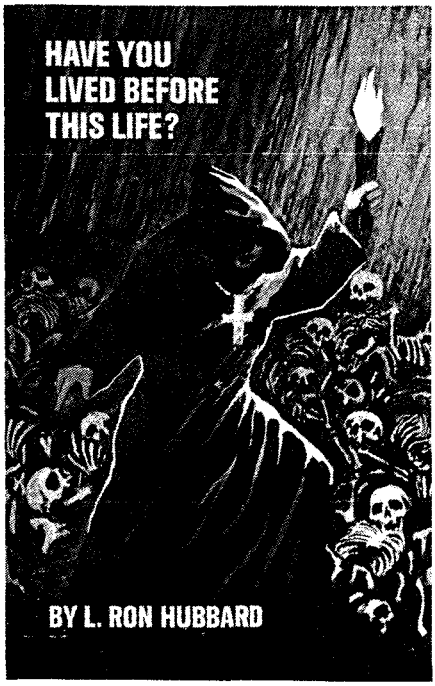

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